

Understanding Influences on Read-Aloud Book Choices in K–2 Classrooms: A Bronfenbrenner
Ecological Systems Perspective

by

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B.S., Southern Illinois University, 1995

M.S., Southern Illinois University, 1998

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2026

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Approved by:

Major Professor
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Education

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This basic qualitative research study explores the factors that influence a teacher's decision-making process when choosing a read-aloud for their class. For this study, I interviewed 10 teachers from 5 school districts in 2 states (Illinois and Kansas). The first interview focused on factors that might influence their decision-making process, and the second on the specific books they chose and why they chose them for read-aloud time. Analysis of their responses indicated that teachers were focused on their students' social-emotional needs, their cultural backgrounds, and whether the topics/books were age-appropriate for their students. The analysis also indicated that while teachers were aware of the current cultural climate (prevalence of book bans, limiting school policies, etc.), they weren't directly affected by the limits placed on their choices; instead, they chose to proceed cautiously to avoid conflicts with parents.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my major professor, Dr. Debbie Mercer. Your guidance and patience throughout this process were appreciated and were integral to the success of this dissertation. To my doctoral committee members, Dr. Suzanne Porath, Dr. Craig McGill, Dr. Kay Taylor, and Dr. Eileen Wertzberger, your insight into the dissertation process, research, teaching, and guidance have been tremendously helpful. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Beth Pesnell. While we didn't often talk about my dissertation, you were the friend and colleague I didn't know I needed as I navigated my roles as graduate teaching assistant/instructor and doctoral student.

I would also like to acknowledge my research participants. Classroom teachers are overworked, underfunded, and underpaid, and yet they still willingly gave up some of their precious time to answer my questions and talk about children's literature. Every one of my participants seemed eager to help with my research and eager to talk about books and teaching. I am so appreciative of them, their time, and all they do for their students.

I want to thank my family. My brother and sister-in-law asked thoughtful and engaging questions about my research and progress. Even though you live across the country, I still felt your support every day. My mom and my husband (in equal measure), without your patience and support as I balanced parenting, being a wife, a daughter, a student, a teacher, and a researcher, I might not have finished this journey. Finally, my daughter, I've tried very hard to balance being present as your mom while also being a student, a teacher, and a researcher. Some days I succeeded, and some days I did not. I appreciate your patience and support, and I want you to know that you are a big part of why I began and finished this journey.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Michael Robert Jackson, EdD (University of Florida, 1968), and my mother, Evelyn Weichert Jackson, PhD (Southern Illinois University, 1975). They were my role models for advancing my education to the highest levels and for providing the love and support that let me know I could achieve this. This dissertation is also dedicated to my daughter, Annabelle Jane Anderson, who reminds me that everything is “figureoutable,” and to my husband, Brian Lamar Anderson. Thank you for the time and space to complete this. I love you both.

Chapter 1 – Overview of Study

Introduction and Rationale

“She looks like me!” “Her hair is curly, just like mine!” “That character has hearing aids just like me!” These quotes were from my bi-racial, hard-of-hearing daughter as she discovered book characters that she could relate to while we read stories together and as she chose books to read independently. Characters in books who looked like her and lived with the same disability she has helped her identify with the stories and fostered her love of reading. These were picture books, and she often focused on their covers, but she has continued to seek out stories with characters she can relate to.

Multicultural literature is defined as literature that embraces many cultures and where those cultures are integral to the story (Brown, n.d.). Diverse children’s literature can cover many identities, including ethnicity, race, culture, languages, sexuality/gender, disabilities, socioeconomic status, dialect variances, and family structures (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). Shaping students’ global perspectives means sharing literature that reflects global voices and experiences, such as those described in the above categories and topics (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). Although one traditionally thinks of diverse children’s books as those with non-Eurocentric characters and themes, society is continually evolving, and it is important to recognize other communities that have been traditionally excluded from the conversation and from children’s stories.

Diverse children’s literature should serve as a mirror, window, or sliding glass door, helping students see themselves in a text (Bishop, 1990). To expand on Bishop’s view, books can provide the reader with a reflection of their own experiences (mirror), with a peek into another person’s experiences (window), and allow the reader to step through (sliding glass door) and experience another person’s perspective/experiences. Children bring a range of experiences to

the classroom. It is essential to shift the focus to view these different identities as strengths and celebrate the experiences students bring to the classroom (Fuhrman, 2020). Children learn conflict management and develop empathy for others when diverse identities are viewed as strengths and celebrated through culturally authentic read-alouds (Johnston, 2015).

Representation matters, especially in elementary classrooms (Johnston, 2015; Norris, 2020; Wanless & Crawford, 2016). One of the easiest ways to represent multiple viewpoints and be culturally responsive to our students (Gay, 2018) is through quality children's literature (Harper & Brand, 2012; Howlett & Young, 2019). The term read-aloud refers to books that teachers read to their students (whole class) that fall outside the district-mandated literacy curriculum. A read-aloud is often done for the pleasure of reading/listening but may also be combined with a learning strategy or a mini-lesson (Fisher et al. 2004). It is typically a book chosen by the students or the teacher. Teachers share stories with their students numerous times a day, have classroom libraries stocked with books, and have books in classroom centers throughout the room. These books and their teaching should represent the children in our classrooms, the children they encounter on the playground, the families in their neighborhoods, and the people they see in the media. Students need to see themselves reflected in the children's literature teachers use in their classrooms (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). Suppose we desire to create students with global perspectives; in that case, classroom educators must offer students opportunities to see themselves in text and encounter alternative perspectives. They will develop an understanding of lives beyond their own when introduced to diverse children's literature (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). Participating in a literate community allows culturally and linguistically diverse students the opportunity to become productive members of society (Callins, 2006). When students can see and hear themselves reflected in their classroom environment, in

literature, and in instruction, they tend to be more engaged academically and experience improved social and emotional outcomes (Todd, 2021). Teachers are the primary conduit for introducing children to diverse literature in their classrooms through read-aloud and classroom libraries.

One of the most effective ways to engage students, build on their experiences, and introduce them to new experiences is through interactive read-alouds using culturally diverse books (Wright, 2019). The intentional use of culturally diverse read-alouds encourages students to interact with peers who may be culturally different from them, thereby helping them develop cross-cultural competence (Johnston, 2015). The purposeful use of culturally diverse children's books suggests that the stories align with curriculum goals and are meaningfully integrated throughout the curriculum (Johnston, 2015). Topics in culturally diverse children's books can cover social justice, cultural appreciation, and diversity (Norris, 2020), and children's interests are best served when an adult engages them in conversations about the issues. The best way to do this is through daily read-alouds with picture books (Norris, 2020). Furthermore, the read-aloud allows teachers to share books that are above students' independent reading level (Fisher et al., 2004).

Teachers should include literature about characters written by authors who identify with the varying identities found in their class (Fuhrman, 2020). The author's perspective is critical when sharing books with children that may not represent the teacher's perspective or experience. It's important to remember that there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to sharing culturally relevant children's literature. When teacher educators (at the undergraduate and graduate level) model appropriate ways to identify and incorporate culturally diverse literature, they create teachers who feel comfortable using similar books in their classrooms. When elementary

teachers embrace culturally diverse literature in their classrooms, all students will benefit, especially those who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Elementary teachers can help their students feel welcome and capable of success by actively employing culturally responsive strategies (Gay, 2018) and by understanding their students' strengths (Fuhrman, 2020). Culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) refers to the practices and interactions that teachers engage in demonstrating sensitivity to communication styles, learning styles, and cultural norms.

Problem Statement

Scholars have explored the types of books (focusing on multicultural and general titles) that teachers choose for classroom read-alouds (Astolfi, 2012; Lemke, 2020; Ross, 2017) and have asked teachers to provide a rationale for their choices (Giles & Morrison, 2023; Ross, 2017). Teachers have indicated that the availability of books, preference for an author/illustrator, and a connection to the curriculum, among other factors, are their reasons for choosing books (Giles & Morrison, 2023; Lemke, 2020; Ross, 2017). The roles of personal beliefs, pedagogical approaches, and student needs have also been acknowledged (Conradi et al., 2022; Giles & Morrison, 2023); however, the specific ways these factors interact and influence teachers remain underexplored. What is missing is a more in-depth exploration of external factors that may influence teachers' decisions when choosing books for their classroom read-alouds. External factors that may influence a teacher's choice include the students in their classroom, the culture of their community, mandates from their administration or school district, cultural shifts in society, or the evolution of their teaching philosophy over the span of their career. This study explored those potential external factors that influence a teacher's choice of books for a read-aloud through the lens of the different ecological systems

identified by Bronfenbrenner (1979): the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

Purpose Statement

This basic qualitative study (Merriam et al., 2015) explored how kindergarten, first, and second-grade teachers made decisions about the children's literature they shared with their students during daily or weekly whole-class read-alouds. By examining the decision-making process through the lens of Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), this research sought to uncover the complex, contextual factors that shape teachers' book selection practices, providing insights that could inform professional development and support systems for educators in fostering inclusive and culturally relevant literacy experiences for young learners. Specifically, the study examined the immediate and broader systemic influences shaping teachers' book choices, including classroom dynamics, student needs, school culture, and external policies or expectations. By understanding these influences, the study also aimed to identify the challenges teachers face and potential supports that could help them incorporate culturally diverse literature into their teaching practice. The participants in this study were practicing teachers employed in five school districts: three in Illinois and two in Kansas. The three school districts in Illinois and one district in Kansas were in mid-size communities with public universities, and the other district in Kansas is located on a military base near a community with a public university.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this study was: "How do teachers make decisions about the books they select for whole-class read-alouds outside the regular curriculum?" More specifically, the study explored:

- How do classroom-level factors such as student interests, reading levels, and social-emotional needs shape teachers' book selections?
- How do relationships with families and the school community influence teachers' choices?
- How do broader systemic factors, such as school policies, district guidelines, or resource access, impact the books teachers choose to share?
- How do societal trends and cultural movements impact teachers' professional decision-making regarding read-aloud selections?
- How have teachers' book choices evolved throughout their teaching careers, and what experiences or influences have contributed to these shifts?

Definition of Terms

Children's Literature: For this study, children's literature was defined as illustrated picture books written for children in kindergarten through second grade. Publishers have identified the intended audience as children in kindergarten through second grade.

Culturally Relevant: The use of materials (including books), curriculum, and content that incorporates the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and identities of individuals in each setting (the classroom) (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culturally Responsive: Practices and interactions that teachers engage in showing sensitivity to communication styles, learning preferences, and cultural norms (Gay, 2018).

Multicultural Literature: This refers to books and stories that feature characters, themes, and settings from various cultural, ethnic, racial, and social backgrounds. These works should be an authentic reflection of diverse experiences, traditions, languages, and perspectives, aiming to

promote understanding and appreciation of cultural differences (Bishop, 1997). Multicultural literature may also be written by a person who does not identify as white and is a member of a traditionally marginalized community (culturally, physically, religiously, etc.).

Read-Aloud: A book the teacher selects to read to students. It was a selection that fell outside the prescribed curriculum texts that teachers share with their students. Teachers chose the books described as read-alouds in this study.

External factors: For the purposes of this study, external factors referred to influences beyond the teacher, their values, their agendas, and beyond the physical illustrated children's book, the illustrations in the books, the authors, etc.

Age-appropriate: A text is considered age-appropriate if it uses accessible language, has a compelling storyline, features relatable characters, and offers authentic representation. A teacher may also consider the usefulness of the text for cross-curricular use (Cunningham, 2016).

Methodology

This investigation was a basic qualitative research study (Merriam et al., 2015). Teachers in kindergarten, first, and second grade were invited to participate in two semi-structured, open-ended interviews via a recruitment email (Merriam et al., 2015). A Qualtrics survey (Appendix D0 distributed before the first interview collected participants' demographic data. Interviews are foundational to qualitative research because they highlight participants' experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Before the second interview, I asked teachers to gather the books they typically choose for read-alouds in their classrooms. Questions during the second interview (Appendix F) focused on the books and the factors that influenced teachers' selection of those books. Generalization of data is not the intention of this study. The

purpose was to focus on teachers' lived experiences and the factors that affected their decision-making.

Methods (Data Collection/Analysis)

This basic qualitative research study used an interview protocol with questions piloted by peers who were, at one time, elementary school teachers. I asked teachers to complete a Qualtrics survey (Appendix D) before the first interview, which collected information about their backgrounds and training to become teachers. Both interviews were conducted in person or via Zoom. The first interview took 20-25 minutes per teacher. Whether in person or via Zoom, the interviews were recorded by Zoom and uploaded to Otter.ai for transcription. The Zoom recordings and Otter.ai transcriptions were only accessible through my password-protected account. Interview questions (Appendix E) during the first interview with the teachers focused on the decisions they make about choosing books for their class read-aloud, any factors that influence those decisions, and whether the books they choose for read-aloud time are representative of the students in their classroom and offer diverse perspectives not represented by the students in their classroom. The first interview used open-ended questions. The second interview was a follow-up to the first, to clarify and expand participants' answers from the first interview (when needed), and to allow teachers to share books they've recently read aloud or plan to read aloud to their students, and to discuss why they chose those books.

Transcription data from Otter.ai was uploaded to MAXQDA to allow for coding and analysis. My notes were also uploaded to MAXQDA for coding and analysis. Themes were derived from the data to support the investigation's results and conclusions.

Delimitations

This basic qualitative research study (Merriam et al., 2015) focused on kindergarten through second-grade teachers. These grade levels were chosen because they aligned with the Science of Reading I course at the university where I taught and obtained my degree. The grade levels were also included in my teacher certification. The investigation focused on the internal and external factors influencing teachers' decisions when choosing books for read-alouds.

Summary

The classroom read-aloud should include diverse children's literature that reflects students and provides windows and sliding doors into other cultures and experiences (Bishop, 1990; Fuhman, 2020; and Johnston, 2015). This basic qualitative research study (Merriam et al., 2015) explored teachers' choice of books for classroom read-aloud experiences. It focused on elementary school teachers in kindergarten, first- and second grade in a couple of mid-size midwestern university towns and one military base (adjacent to a university town). Interview questions explored the teachers' backgrounds, their current classroom experiences, their relationships with their students and their students' families, and the choices they made in their classrooms about the books they share with their students.

The next chapter focuses on a review of the literature, including the chosen theoretical framework for this study, the use of culturally relevant literature in the elementary classroom, defining the classroom read-aloud, the teacher's role in choosing literature for the classroom read-aloud, and related studies that explored teacher choice in the classroom read-aloud.

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

Multicultural or diverse children's literature covers a variety of cultures, and the cultural aspects are integral to the story (Brown, n.d.). The presence or lack of diverse characters and themes in children's literature has become increasingly relevant in today's ever-diversifying society (Bennett et al., 2018; Howlett & Young, 2019; Norris, 2020). In much of the United States, classrooms are comprised of students representing a range of ethnicities, abilities, and backgrounds. Children's literature is often seen as the thread that ties those experiences together and encourages students to learn from and reflect on the world around them (Delgado, 2021). Understanding the successes and barriers teachers face when choosing and sharing diverse books with their students allows us to identify the necessary steps to increase the use of diverse books in our early elementary classrooms.

This basic qualitative study (Merriam et al., 2015) explored how kindergarten, first, and second-grade teachers made decisions about the children's literature they shared with their students during daily or weekly whole-class read-alouds. What follows is an exploration of what comprises diverse children's literature, why it is necessary to include diverse literature in our classrooms, what culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) teaching looks like, how to incorporate diverse literature into classrooms, and existing research on how teachers choose the books they share with their students. When one understands what diverse literature looks like and why it is essential to share in a classroom setting, educators can make informed decisions regarding the literature they choose and choose the best possible literature to share in their classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

This basic qualitative research study was grounded in Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) (1979). Bronfenbrenner described a series of systems that impact a

person's behavior and choices: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Figure 2.1).

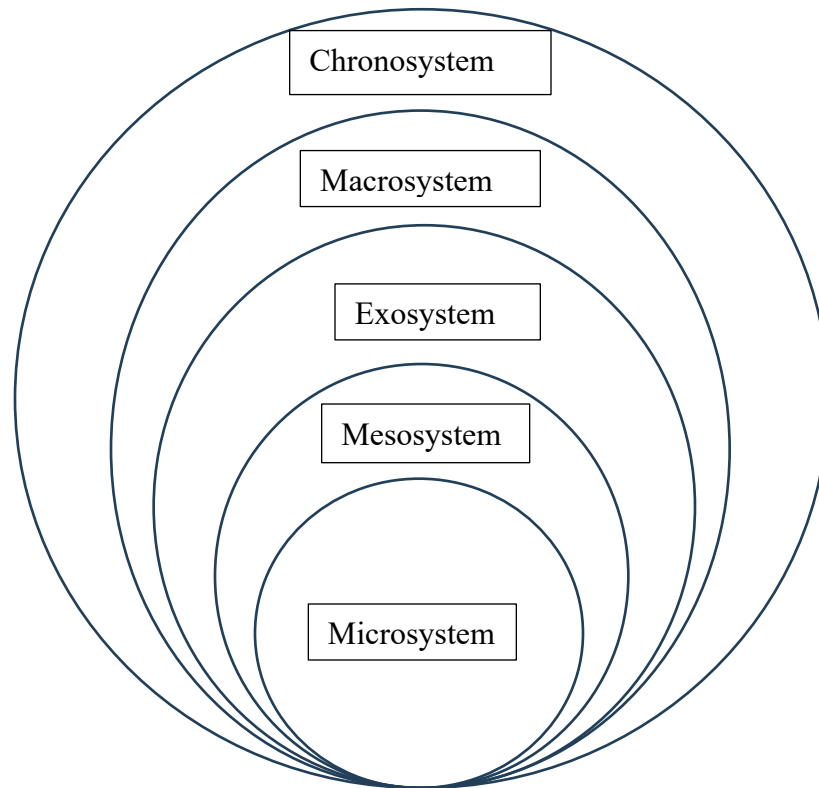


Figure 0-1 Bronfenbrenner's Spheres of Influence. Adapted from Budzyna & Buckley (2023).

While this theory is often applied to child development and adult education, it has also been used in studies on educational accountability, educational transition, early childhood education, and higher education (Tong & An, 2024). Using the EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), researchers explored how the various ecological systems affected teachers' decision-making (Liu & Hall, 2014) and instructional choices (Becker, 2000). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the interconnected layers of influence on these decisions, ranging from individual teacher preferences to broader societal and institutional contexts. It has not yet been used to specifically explore how the various

systems impact teachers' choices of which literature to share with their students during a read-aloud.

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) suggests that teachers bring their background experiences and knowledge to the classroom as they interact with their students, influencing their instructional choices, including the books they read to their students (microsystem). A classroom teacher may have favorite books they read each year. They may have favorite authors they share with their students each year. Some classroom teachers may survey students' interests and build their read-aloud selection from the results. Other classroom teachers may seek out stories that reflect their students' lived experiences and share them during a read-aloud.

Teachers interact with their coworkers and their students' families (mesosystem). Those interactions will also likely impact teachers' choices when choosing a read-aloud. Teachers collaborate with peers in the same grade level, regularly sharing resources and ideas. Resource sharing often includes sharing book titles. Some teachers host guest readers in their classrooms, inviting family members to share favorite books with their class. Throughout the school year, classroom teachers can get to know their students' families and may choose books that reflect their cultures and identities.

School policies and the availability of community resources influence teachers' decisions about the books they share with their students (exosystem). Access to the public and school libraries may impact which books a teacher chooses to share. Libraries that house a variety of texts that mirror the communities they serve offer a classroom teacher the opportunity to select and share books that may provide a window or a mirror for their students. School policies that limit or encourage read-aloud experiences in the classroom by dictating the types of books

shared or giving teachers choices will impact which books a teacher chooses to share with their students.

Ecological Systems Theory (EST) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) would also suggest that cultural and societal influences, including the current political climate and discussion about book bans, may impact a teacher's choice of read-aloud books (macrosystem). Book banning in the United States dates to 1624 (Bush, 2020). It has seemingly increased in popularity in the last few years, with 1,586 book bans identified in nine months between 2021 and 2022 (Blakemore, 2024). Teaching under the current cultural and political climate may affect a teacher's book selection for their classroom read-aloud if book bans limit their selections or if they are cautious about reactions to the books they might share.

Finally, with knowledge and experience, beliefs may change over time, and EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) suggests that this will impact teacher choices in the classroom (chronosystem). Teachers participate in professional development each year through their school district, and some seek to attend workshops and conferences outside their district. Many teachers continue their education through university coursework beyond their bachelor's degree, seeking additional certifications and/or teaching-related degrees. The information gained from professional development experiences and continuing education may expand their knowledge of the types of books appropriate to share during classroom read-alouds. I will analyze and interpret the teachers' responses to interview questions through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Framework.

The Use of Culturally Relevant vs. Culturally Responsive

Culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) refers to the materials, curriculum, and content an educator uses that authentically reflect a culture, with accurate information and

depictions of people, customs, and traditions. Culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) refers to the practices and interactions teachers engage in with their students that reflect an understanding and respect for their students' cultures and communities. Culturally relevant literature may be one vehicle teachers use to practice culturally responsive teaching. This study focuses on the factors influencing teachers' selection of literature and their rationale behind those choices. In this context, culturally responsive teaching may be examined, and the selection of culturally relevant literature may be considered.

Culturally Relevant Literature

Books shared with children in their classrooms should genuinely reflect the cultures represented and accurately depict images and events realistically (Delgado, 2021). Many books depict cultures as they existed in the past or as they were perceived to have existed. Although these books would be considered multicultural, they would not necessarily be culturally relevant or culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) to children now (Delgado, 2021). A multicultural book may depict a family living in ancient China, such as *Tikki Tikki Tembo* (Mosel, 1968), a Chinese folktale. While this lyrical book represented a positive sibling relationship and was popular for many years, the depiction of Asians is problematic. Author Grace Lin (2012) shares thoughts from her friend Irene Rideout (an Asian American), who succinctly detailed why the story is problematic. The story is not a Chinese folktale; the character depictions more closely resemble Japanese people, as do the illustrations. The names and language in the story are not of Chinese origin, and the assertion that Chinese families gave firstborn children long names has not been proven true (Lin, 2012). There are other books with more relevant and responsive depictions of Asian characters and lifestyles that teachers should be sharing with their students.

The Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC), School of Education, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has compiled data since 1985 on books written by and about African Americans, Indigenous peoples, Asian Americans, Latinx, Pacific Islanders (a separate category since 2018), and Arabs (CCBC Diversity Statistics, n.d.). Their most recent data was released in March of 2025. Comparing the last six years (2018-2024), while the number of books submitted has dropped slightly since 2019, the representation remains about the same in each category, with 2024 showing the highest values for each category except for books published by and about Latinx, which had a slight decrease from 2023 to 2024 (see Figure 2.2).

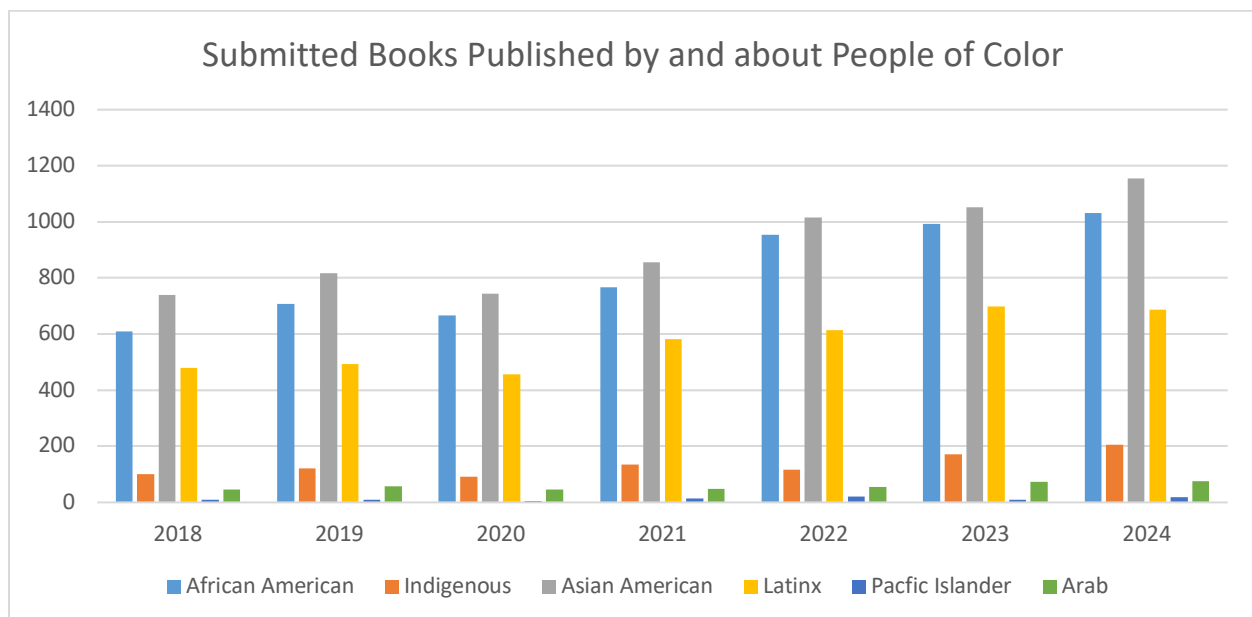


Figure 0-2 : Comparison of the number of books published by and about authors of color by year.

The total number of books submitted peaked in 2019 with 4,077, then saw a sharp decrease in 2020, but has steadily increased from 2020 to 2024 (See Figure 2.3). The decrease in 2020 was due to the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic (CCBC diversity statistics, n.d.).

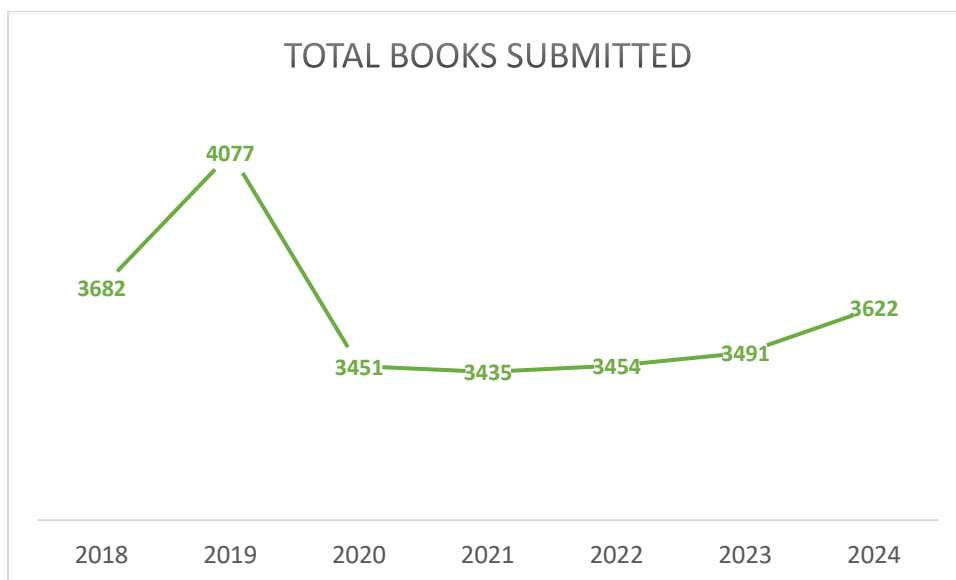


Figure 0-3 : Total number of books submitted by publishers to the CCBC from 2018 to 2024.

In the last year of data (2024), 86% of books submitted to the CCBC were written by and about authors of color. Over the past four years, books written by and about people of color have accounted for 74% of submissions to the CCBC. It is increasingly difficult to argue that one cannot find culturally relevant books to share in one's classroom. These statistics do not consider books written about sexuality/gender, children with disabilities, alternative family structures, etc.; however, those books also factor into being culturally relevant and diverse in today's classrooms. This data reflects books submitted to the CCBC, not all books published within a year.

There is a distinction between multicultural literature and culturally relevant literature (Delgado, 2021). The former may represent a specific time and a distinct culture, but may not be suitable for today's students. The latter is representative of the experiences children today may have (Wanless & Crawford, 2016). The statistics reflect the availability of children's literature written by racially diverse authors or that covers racially diverse topics. The numbers suggest

there are books to choose from for those looking for culturally relevant literature to share with their students.

Culturally relevant children's literature can address many identities, including ethnicity, race, culture, language, sexuality/gender, disabilities, socioeconomic status, dialectal variation, and family structures (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). Shaping students' global perspectives means sharing literature that reflects global voices and experiences, such as those described in the categories and topics above. Literature that fits these definitions helps the reader understand how different "identities intersect across communities" (Delgado, 2021, p. 36). Although one traditionally thinks of diverse children's books as those with non-Eurocentric characters and themes, it is essential to move beyond race/ethnicity and recognize other communities that have been traditionally left out of the conversation and excluded from children's stories.

Culturally Relevant Literature in the Classroom

Culturally relevant children's literature should serve as a mirror, a window, or a door for students to see themselves reflected in the text, view another person's perspective, or step through and experience what someone else is going through (Bishop, 1990). When a child can read a culturally relevant book, or has a culturally relevant book read to them, they see their own experiences valued and respected. When a book highlights a culture or ethnicity different from the reader's, children can have a window into someone else's experience, broadening their perspective (Bishop, 1990). Doors in literature are present when the author has crafted a tale that allows the reader to step into the protagonist's shoes and experience their story (Bishop, 1990). Diverse books are "mirrors in which children can see and savor images and representations similar to their own lives and experiences" (Wanless & Crawford, 2016, p. 12). It is essential to shift the focus to view these different identities as strengths and celebrate the experiences that

students bring to the classroom (Fuhrman, 2020) rather than viewing them as characteristics that divide.

Once a student's perspective is broadened, they can demonstrate empathy and form stronger bonds with their peers (Johnston, 2015). Including multicultural literature in a classroom to teach comprehension and vocabulary encourages children to make meaningful connections between the skills taught and the broader messages found in the literature (Harper & Brand, 2010). While Harper and Brand (2010) specifically addressed early childhood classrooms, it is reasonable to conclude that this can be true of elementary and secondary classrooms when multicultural literature is infused into the curriculum. Considering the most effective ways to share these stories with students is essential (Henderson et al., 2020; Howlett & Young, 2019; Kesler et al., 2020). The teacher read-aloud has been identified as a valuable and effective tool for sharing a variety of stories with students (Wanless & Crawford, 2016).

The Teacher Read-Aloud

The teacher read-aloud has demonstrated positive impacts on students' vocabulary development (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Kindle, 2009; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Routman, 2003), comprehension skills (Santoro et al., 2008), fluency skills (Hurst et al., 2011; Trelease, 2013), deepens their emotional intelligence (Forgan & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2004; Jackson & Panyan, 2002), and refines their pronunciation and inflection skills (Routman, 2003). When teachers read aloud to their students, they are often picking books that are above their students' silent reading level (Layne, 2015). By doing this, teachers are exposing their students to richer vocabulary, "more complex literary devices, and more sophisticated sentence structures" (Layne, 2015, p. 55) than they would typically encounter on their own while reading.

A teacher's read-aloud can take different forms in an elementary classroom. Some options teachers can choose to use include an uninterrupted read-aloud format (Norris, 2020), an interactive read-aloud format (Wright, 2019), or a dialogic read-aloud format (Acosto-Tello, 2019; Whitehurst et al., 1994). An uninterrupted read-aloud is one in which the teacher reads the story straight through without stopping. They read with expression and fluency, but don't engage the students while reading the story. Discussion and questions take place after the reading ends. Students may be given prompts to think about while listening to the story to keep them actively engaged. An interactive read-aloud is one in which the students and teacher actively engage with each other while reading the story. Teachers plan questions and discussion prompts throughout the story, pausing at various points to engage students. The question and discussion prompts often focus on skill-building related to comprehension strategies (Johnston, 2015). In an interactive read-aloud, students engage with each other and the teacher. A dialogic read-aloud is like an interactive read-aloud in that students are more actively involved in the story experience; they're not just sitting and listening. A dialogic read-aloud is often understood as a conversation between the reader and the listener. Students actively participate in the story by completing repetitive phrases as the teacher reads. Teachers ask questions as they read, prompting students to make predictions (Acosto-Tello, 2019).

Best Practices During a Teacher Read-Aloud

Teachers in today's diverse classrooms can use the read-aloud to teach about similarities and differences, to use a character's voice to discuss culturally relevant issues, and to expose students to diverse characters and genres (Johnston, 2015). Best practices include choosing books that accurately portray historical facts and perspectives (Johnston, 2015), provide space for students to think critically and respond to texts, actively listen, ask questions, participate in

discussion (Norris, 2020), and allow students the chance to “express themselves as individuals, connect with others, and make sense of the world” (Fisher et al., 2004, p. 9).

Seven essential components that seasoned teachers regularly consider when implementing an interactive read-aloud (Fisher et al., 2004):

- 1) Books chosen were appropriate to students’ interests and matched to their developmental, emotional, and social levels.
- 2) Selections had been previewed and practiced by the teacher.
- 3) A clear purpose for the read-aloud was established.
- 4) Teachers modeled fluent oral reading when they read the text.
- 5) Teachers were animated and used expression.
- 6) Teachers stopped periodically and thoughtfully questioned the students to focus them on specifics of the text.
- 7) Connections were made to independent reading and writing. (pp. 10-11)

Those seven components are the backbone of an effective read-aloud experience (Giorgis, 2019). When teachers understand their audience, engage listeners with expression and animation, ask thoughtful questions, and extend the listening experience with writing opportunities (Fisher et al., 2004), they provide students with meaningful opportunities to engage with the selected text.

Children’s books contain much richer vocabulary than a standard classroom or home conversation (Giorgis, 2019). Teachers who read aloud to their students build word mastery and grammatical understanding, vital to learning how to read (Giorgis, 2019). Culturally authentic read-alouds encourage tolerance, highlight conflicts and resolutions, and help children acquire empathy and understanding for others (Johnston, 2015). Reading aloud to students allows those

who have not yet engaged in independent reading to experience fluent reading through their teacher's voice (Wright, 2019).

Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors

The phrase "Windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors" was coined by Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) to refer to culturally diverse texts. It applies to readers of all ages and is equally important in picture books as in chapter books. The books our students read and have read to them should reflect who they are, their experiences, and the world around them. Bishop (1990) explains:

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers only have to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading then becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (n.p.)

She encapsulated the books' critical role in helping readers understand who they are and how they fit into the world, drawing on a broad diversity of experiences and perspectives.

Books available as read-alouds for young children cover a range of topics, cultures, and ethnicities. There are books with main characters who are hard of hearing, like *Listen: How Evelyn Glennie, a Deaf Girl, Changed Percussion* (Stocker, 2022) and *Let's Hear it for Amigal* (Kupfer, 2012), that may act as windows and sliding doors for children to understand better a culture they are not part of. Books highlighting the contributions of African American women to

science and civil rights, such as *Hidden Figures: The True Story of Four Black Women and the Space Race* (Shetterly, 2018) and *Ida B. Wells: Voice of Truth* (Duster, 2022). For some children, those books are mirrors that reflect their ethnicity; for others, they are windows and sliding doors into a pivotal time in our country's history. *My Brother Charlie* (Peete & Peete, 2016) explores what it is like to have a brother who has autism. Again, they provide a mirror for some, a window for others, or a sliding door for a few children. *Show Way* by Jacqueline Woodson (2005) and *Red Kite, Blue Kite* (2013) by Ji-Li Jiang offer illustrated historical perspectives for young children. By representing other cultural groups and ethnicities, those books also offer a mirror for some and a window or sliding door for others. *The Ocean Calls: A Haenyeo Mermaid Story* (Cho, 2020) offers a more modern perspective on Korean culture that may again serve as a mirror, a window, or a sliding door for students. Selecting culturally relevant books is one element of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Representation matters, and students must see themselves reflected in the children's literature teachers use in their classrooms (Bishop, 1990). We should desire to create students with global perspectives who see themselves as global citizens. Through diverse children's literature, learners need to see themselves in the text and encounter alternative views, enabling them to develop an understanding of lives beyond their own (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). When students can see and hear themselves reflected in their classroom environment, in literature, and in instruction, they tend to be more engaged academically and experience improved social and emotional outcomes (Todd, 2021).

There are steps one can take towards more culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) teaching: recognize the need, get to know one's students, look for culturally relevant texts, use those

culturally relevant texts in instruction, and create opportunities for critical and personal responses to the texts (Sharma & Christ, 2017). The term multicultural does not always equate to cultural relevance. For a book to be culturally relevant and appropriate for use, it must have themes that the children can identify with. Characters and locations should feel familiar to the reader (Delgado, 2021). Teachers build on their students' funds of knowledge by introducing children to diverse literature in their classrooms through read-alouds and classroom libraries (Wright, 2019). Maintaining high expectations, exposing students to academically rich curricula and materials, emphasizing student-regulated active learning experiences, using culturally and linguistically responsive approaches, and using instructional technologies that enhance learning are hallmarks of classrooms with effective teaching and culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) learning environments (Callins, 2006).

The Role of Literature in Culturally Responsive Teaching

There are many ways to incorporate diverse children's literature into instruction. The interactive read-aloud is perhaps the most common, but diverse children's literature should also support content area instruction in math, science, social studies, and language arts (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). Using literature that represents diverse cultures and supports a math or science standard introduces students to culturally relevant literature. Multicultural literature can improve language and literacy skills by introducing vocabulary associated with traditions and people worldwide (Harper & Brand, 2010). Sharing diverse literature with students activates their prior knowledge and helps them connect with the text (a comprehension strategy).

Using culturally relevant literature in an elementary classroom supports Banks's (2018) view that multicultural education is appropriate for all children. Benefits for all children include enhanced racial and ethnic pride, greater cultural competence, and a stronger capacity to interact

positively with others from varied backgrounds (Banks, 2018). Introducing literature that provides windows and sliding doors into other cultures, ethnicities, and experiences builds up rather than tears down a student's ability to effectively and positively interact with others (Norris, 2020; Sims, 1990). Teachers typically use one of four methods to integrate multiculturalism into the curriculum: the contribution approach, the additive approach, the transformative approach, and/or the decision-making and social action approach (Banks, 2018). The transformative approach and the decision-making and social action approach go beyond occasional references to a culture or ethnic group and encourage educators to be more immersed in their approach. For instance, a teacher who wants to celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK, Jr.) and his contributions to society with her class. Using the contribution approach (Banks, 2018), the teacher would share a book about Martin Luther King, Jr., such as *Happy Birthday Martin Luther King* by Jean Marzollo (1993), with her students. This text highlights his successes as a civil rights leader. There would be limited discussion of MLK, Jr.'s struggles and likely no mention of other civil rights leaders. He would be mentioned near his birthday in January and not mentioned again.

With the additive approach (Banks, 2018), the teacher will include texts on other civil rights leaders/activists without fundamentally changing how information is shared. It's still likely to be shared from a mainstream perspective and may not accurately portray the situation. The transformative approach (Banks, 2018) includes perspectives and viewpoints across the cultural and ethnic spectrum. This approach changes how curriculum content is shared and alters whose viewpoint is centered (Harper & Brand, 2010; Norris, 2020). Still focusing on MLK, Jr. and the civil rights movement, the teacher will share first-person narratives, texts, audio, and video clips featuring MLK, Jr., as well as others involved, such as Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and Medgar

Evers. The teacher will also create a classroom atmosphere that values diverse voices and connects current and historical events. Using the social action approach (Banks, 2018), the teacher uses all the elements of the transformative approach and empowers their students to act. The focus is on arming students with knowledge, teaching them to be reflective, and encouraging them to participate in social change (Banks, 2018). Students are presented with a problem in their environment and encouraged to find ways to create change that aligns with their readings. The students are tasked with and taught how to take action to foster change. They use resources, including knowledge they've gained from readings. The type of approach a teacher chooses to use could be shaped in some part by the information learned in their teacher preparation program.

The Role of Teacher Preparation Programs

Highly trained teachers implement high-quality literacy instruction. These highly trained teachers arise from highly effective teacher preparation programs (Risko & Reid, 2019). When teacher educators model appropriate ways to identify and incorporate culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) teaching strategies, they create teachers who can enter classrooms and replicate them. Teacher educators must be more intentional in preparing candidates to identify and incorporate culturally diverse literature in their future classrooms (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). Teacher preparation programs should provide training on identifying high-quality, culturally appropriate children's literature. Teacher candidates should have opportunities to practice critically analyzing children's literature, identifying its cultural dimensions (Sharma & Christ, 2017). Teacher candidates should be aware that their book choices may face challenges from parents/community groups, but they must also be advocates for quality, diverse children's literature (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). In addition to exposing teacher candidates to a wide range of

quality, diverse children's literature, instruction on establishing and maintaining a classroom collection of books that integrates authentic texts within the district-mandated reading curriculum (Catapano et al., 2009) should be an integral part of their teacher training curriculum. Familiarizing teacher candidates with awards and honors that authors and illustrators of diverse texts may win further helps them identify high-quality diverse children's literature to include in their classrooms (Sharp & Johnson, 2016).

Additionally, teacher preparation programs must prepare their prospective teachers to teach racially, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students (Risko & Reid, 2019). They may do this by helping them understand how to develop an anti-bias classroom library and how culture and ethnicity influence teaching and learning (Howlett & Young, 2019).

The Teacher's Role in Choosing Culturally Relevant Literature

When teachers embrace a culturally relevant literacy approach, all students will benefit, especially those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (Barnes, 2006; Bishop, 1990; Delgado, 2021). Teachers can help their students feel welcome and capable of success by actively employing culturally responsive strategies (Gay, 2018) and by understanding their students' strengths (Fuhrman, 2020). Teachers choose books to share with their students outside the curriculum during teacher read-aloud time.

Classroom libraries should contain a diverse array of books representing a variety of genres, include a range of narrative and expository texts covering a breadth of topics, and span multiple reading levels (Catapano et al., 2009). One key to building a high-quality classroom library is identifying award-winning, culturally relevant books that avoid stereotypes and racism. Teachers may need additional training to cultivate a library that meets that criterion (Catapano et al., 2009). Building a classroom library takes time and often involves weeding out books from

the previous teacher's collection. Quality over quantity is critical initially, with a commitment to building the classroom library over time.

Spending time self-evaluating a classroom library helps create a more purposeful collection of books for students to share. Catapano, Fleming, and Elias (2009) developed a self-evaluation checklist (Appendix A) for teachers to organize and reorganize their libraries and reading centers. A self-evaluation checklist is a user-friendly tool for teachers. Catapano and colleagues (2009) did not include guidelines for examining the diversity of books in their classrooms. They have only one item that asks if their classroom library includes “many books that are relevant to my students’ backgrounds and cultural communities” (Catapano et al., 2009, p. 64). The researchers could update their checklist to include definitions of what constitutes high-quality culturally relevant books and a section for evaluating the diversity of the books' content and authors. Just as it is essential to have a variety of genres in a classroom library with relevant and up-to-date information, it is also important to include books written by and about diverse authors.

Best Practices for Incorporating Culturally Relevant Literature

Structured learning experiences effectively incorporate culturally relevant literature into the curriculum. There are three structured learning experiences that lend themselves to incorporating culturally relevant children’s literature: interactive read-alouds, family response journals, and supporting content-area instruction in mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). They advocate that teachers must be prepared to effectively incorporate quality, diverse children’s literature in their classrooms.

They go further and make three recommendations for teachers: ensure that high-quality, diverse children’s literature is accessible in their classrooms and school libraries, familiarize

themselves with award-winning books to be able to identify excellent models of diverse children's literature, and engage in continuous professional development opportunities to read and discuss diverse children's literature (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). A faculty book club to read, discuss, and review diverse books would also be an excellent way to identify and incorporate more diverse children's literature into the curriculum. Educators wishing to move towards more culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) teaching should choose curricula and texts whose characters are represented in authentic and varied ways, remove literature that reinforces stereotypes, involve families and community members as guest experts in the classroom, and remove literature that disproportionately represents identities not shared by students (Todd, 2021).

Teachers should include literature about characters written by authors who identify with the varying identities found in their class (Fuhrman, 2020). There is no one-size-fits-all approach to a culturally responsive curriculum (Gay, 2018). Text sets or collections of related books work well in a classroom. Remember that no one book can fully represent a group or complex issue (Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Understanding the students in one's class and their varying identities is the key to making a culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) curriculum work for each classroom.

Researchers have identified five components as the foundation of a culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) early childhood classroom: "developing a culturally responsive classroom community, family engagement, critical literacy within a social justice framework, multicultural literature, and culturally responsive print-rich environment" (Bennett et al., 2018, p. 242). Those five criteria would also seem to create a firm foundation at any other classroom level, elementary, intermediate, or secondary. Further, there are two broad categories to consider (Brown, n.d.) when selecting children's literature: Does the book demonstrate cultural integrity?

Does the book avoid exoticizing the culture represented in the story? One can ensure the book meets those criteria by using the Seven Ways to Evaluate Multicultural Literature (n.d.) to assess the book for a read-aloud and to include it in the classroom library. The seven ways involve looking for evidence of (or lack of) stereotyping, author expertise, authentic illustrations, and authentic cultural details, among others. Teachers may consider these eight questions when selecting books to share with their students: Do the illustrations and words accurately portray the culture's language and experiences? Does the author or illustrator represent the same background as the characters portrayed in the book? Are the main characters the same race/ethnicity/religion as the reader? Are the readers the same age as the main characters? Do the main characters talk like the reader? Are the settings culturally relevant? Could the reader have lived in or visited places like those in the story, or could the story have taken place this year? Has the reader had an experience like the one in the story? Knowing their students' lives allows teachers to consider those questions when sharing literature (Sharma & Christ, 2017).

A culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) classroom community does not follow a tourist curriculum (Sleeter, 2010) that celebrates culture only for its food and dress/costumes. Instead, one should find teachers facilitating conversations using multicultural children's literature to conduct book talks, peer reading, and conferences (Bennett et al., 2018), connecting the cultures represented and explored through the literature with students' personal cultural experiences. Access to books with diverse characters and themes seems to be the common elemental thread.

Review of Key Literature

Inquiries have been made into teachers' decision-making processes when selecting children's literature to share with their students. Studies have asked teachers to identify a recent book they shared with their students and give a reason for choosing that book (Giles & Morrison,

2023) or queried teachers on how often they make decisions to choose a book for a read-aloud by tracking the books they read over a specific time (Ross, 2017). Neither study approached the decision-making process from the Ecological Systems Theory framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Among the reasons teachers reported choosing a book, some of the most common ones were because they fit a current theme of study, were related to a current holiday or event, were requested by a student, were part of the curriculum, taught a skill/assisted with classroom management, or for pleasure (teacher or student favorite) (Giles & Morrison, 2023 & Ross, 2017). If one were using the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as a framework for identifying why teachers chose books, the above-named reasons would most surely fit into several of the identified systems. Still, researchers have not yet used this framework to explore the factors influencing teachers' decisions about which books to share.

Mixed-methods studies have used a combination of interviews and surveys to examine how teachers select books for classroom read-alouds (Ross, 2017). Phase 1 of Ross's (2017) mixed-methods study included 15 participants who were surveyed and asked to keep a read-aloud log, in which they self-reported which books they read over a specific period. Phase II of Ross's (2017) study involved surveying teachers outside her geographic area, yielding 259 responses. All participants were teachers in kindergarten, first grade, or second grade. In addition to considering access to resources and why teachers choose to read aloud to their students, Ross (2017) also explored why teachers chose the books they read aloud. She considered the characteristics of the books (female-authored/illustrated, author of color, female main character, and main character of color). Ross found a slight increase in the use of books by authors of color compared to studies conducted in previous years (2017). She asked teachers why they chose the

books they used for their read-alouds. She then sorted that information into eight categories (Ross, 2017):

- 1) It assisted in teaching or developing skills.
- 2) It correlated to a holiday or current event.
- 3) It was either a teacher or student favorite.
- 4) It connected to a current classroom theme or topic.
- 5) It was included (in) a curriculum they adhere to.
- 6) It was because of the author, illustrator, or character in the text.
- 7) It was meant to promote a life skill or citizenship.
- 8) It was at a student's request. (p. 72)

Seven of the eight categories that Ross (2017) identified appear to be centered around the text specifically and don't address external influences that may be at play.

A phenomenographic study (Lemke, 2020) focused specifically on teachers' use of multicultural literature in primary classrooms, with teachers citing illustrations and themes as the most common factors influencing their decisions. Lemke's (2020) study involved 15 participants who taught kindergarten through second grade and completed an open-ended questionnaire. If five or more participants referenced a factor, Lemke (2020) considered it to be a relevant reason for selecting a book for a read-aloud. Seven factors emerged from Lemke's (2020) study, including illustrations, theme, culture, text/plot, holiday-focused, characters, and relatability. The results of this study appear to center on book factors rather than external factors. While book factors are certainly relevant to selecting books during a read-aloud, this basic qualitative research study (Merriam et al., 2015) will focus on external factors and influences a teacher navigates when choosing a book for a read-aloud.

Focusing exclusively on the second question that Giles & Morrison (2023) used, “Why did you choose this book?” is relevant to this research study. Giles & Morrison (2023) surveyed 151 pre-kindergarten teachers in the southeastern United States to examine their classroom reading habits, including why they chose the last book they read to their class. 150 teachers responded to this question, and the researchers grouped them into five broad categories. Those categories were subject matter, curriculum, student appeal, pleasure, and classroom management. Each of those categories had subcategories identified by participants. Subject matter referred to the time of year (including holidays/weather) and units of study. Curriculum for some indicated that they chose a required text, and others mentioned a particular subcategory such as literacy, health, science, or mathematics. Student appeal included books written by authors students were familiar with, with appealing illustrations, engaging topics, or relatability. Teachers gave reasons for choosing books for pleasure, such as being fun, entertaining, enjoyable, or humorous. Books that fell into the classroom management category were identified as helping with a transition or maintaining a routine. While the researchers explored the broad question of why teachers chose a book for read-aloud, they did not dig into other external factors that may have influenced their decision-making.

In 2012, Astolfi conducted a content analysis in which she asked teachers to provide a list of books they had read to their students. Kindergarten, second, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers at a North Carolina Elementary school participated in the study. Teacher interviews were also conducted to delve into why the read-aloud texts were chosen. For the content analysis (Astolfi, 2012), books were categorized as general fiction, historical fiction, or nonfiction. Historical fiction books were separated from general fiction to determine if characters of color appeared more frequently in historical fiction than in general fiction. White students were in the minority

at this elementary school, and Hispanic students accounted for the largest non-white group (Astolfi, 2012). Astolfi wanted to explore whether non-white characters were more prevalent in historical fiction or general fiction (2012). If they were more prevalent in historical fiction, how were they portrayed, and how does that potentially impact the non-white students at the school (Astolfi, 2012)? 292 titles were identified; the majority (71.92%) were general fiction, 25.68% were nonfiction, 2.4% were historical fiction, and just 57% contained human characters (Astolfi, 2012). Looking at the characters portrayed in the books, Astolfi (2012) found that while white students represented only 42% of the population, that 76% of the characters in the read-alouds were white. Hispanic students, the largest non-white population at the school (36%), were only represented in 1% of the books shared with students (Astolfi, 2012). Black/African American characters in books were found 13% of the time, compared to the school's student population, which was 18% black/African American. The books chosen did not provide students with a mirror in which they could see their experiences reflected, but only a window (Bishop, 1990).

Astolfi also interviewed three teachers at the school, representing second-, fourth-, and fifth-grade language arts (2012). Using seven questions, Astolfi (2012) asked the teachers how they choose books, resources they use to find books, where they get the books from, the role of the students in book selection, how they gauge student interest in the books, how they measure comprehension, and whether students need to see themselves represented in the books they read to them. She discovered a disconnect between the kinds of books the teachers chose to read and the importance they placed on students seeing themselves represented in the books (Astolfi, 2012). Teachers primarily found books through their school library, the public library, other teachers, and local and national booksellers. When asked whether the students played a role in their text selection, they indicated they did not survey students for their interests, and they often

chose books that previous classes had liked or that their own children had enjoyed (Astolfi, 2012). What the teachers seemingly did not do was consider their students' current ethnic makeup when selecting books. Astolfi's (2012) research focused on one primary school in a district with a relatively diverse student population. While she questioned the teachers about why they chose books for their read-aloud time, the results were not analyzed through any theoretical framework.

Continuing the exploration of which titles are chosen by teachers, a nationwide survey in 2022 (La Croix et al., 2024) asked pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers to identify a recent text they had read aloud to their students. 445 teachers responded, identifying 358 unique text titles that the researchers used to create a snapshot of the types of books teachers were reading to their students (La Croix et al., 2024). Researchers found that fiction was the most selected genre (80%) and, within that genre, animals as the main characters were the most popular (59%) (La Croix et al., 2024). It's difficult for children to see themselves represented in texts when many of the main characters are not human. Non-fiction books represented just 16% of the selection (La Croix et al., 2024). Non-fiction texts where humans are the subject of the story provide a realistic mirror for children to see themselves reflected in the text. Other categories the researchers focused on included social-emotional texts, rhyming texts, seasonal influences, and diverse texts (La Croix et al., 2024). The researchers found that the inclusion of diverse texts in the read-alouds appeared serve a purpose, and the genres most represented were realistic fiction and modern fantasy (La Croix et al., 2014). They cautioned that anthropomorphic analogies do not compare to using humans as characters to realistically represent diverse ideas and themes (La Croix et al., 2024). The researchers did not ask teachers to explain why they chose the book they listed; they were focused on which book they chose. They mention expanding future research

opportunities to include observations of read-aloud time to explore why teachers are choosing those books (La Croix et al., 2024).

Summary

There is a wealth of literature and research that defines culturally diverse literature and the use of culturally diverse books in the classroom (Bennett et al., 2018; Bishop, 1990; Delgado, 2021; Fuhman, 2020; Todd, 2021; Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Research on the factors influencing teachers' book choices for their students is limited. Past research has explored the types of books teachers choose for their students (Astolfi, 2012; La Croix et al., 2024) and why teachers choose the books they read during a read-aloud (Astolfi, 2012; Giles & Morrison, 2023; Lemke, 2020; Ross, 2017). This researcher is interested in the external factors that influence a teacher's choice of book to share with their students, the barriers they face when deciding which book to share, and the resources that might help teachers choose a more culturally diverse story. Chapter three will focus on the research methodology used in the study, including the research design, data analysis, and data representation.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Purpose Statement

This basic qualitative study (Merriam et al., 2015) explored how kindergarten, first, and second-grade teachers made decisions about the children’s literature they shared with their students during daily or weekly whole-class read-alouds. Specifically, the study examined the immediate and broader systemic influences shaping teachers’ book choices, including classroom dynamics, student needs, school culture, and external policies or expectations. By understanding these influences, the study also aimed to identify the challenges teachers face and potential supports that could help them incorporate culturally diverse literature into their teaching practice. The participants in this study were practicing teachers employed in kindergarten, first, and second-grade classrooms.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this study was: “How do teachers make decisions about the books they select for whole-class read-alouds outside the regular curriculum?”

More specifically, the study will explore:

- How do classroom-level factors—such as student interests, reading levels, and social-emotional needs—shape teachers’ book selections?
- How do relationships with families and the school community influence teachers’ choices?
- How do broader systemic factors, such as school policies, district guidelines, or resource access, impact the books teachers choose to share?
- How do societal trends and cultural movements impact teachers’ professional decision-making regarding read-aloud selections?

- How have teachers' book choices evolved throughout their teaching careers, and what experiences or influences have contributed to these shifts?

Subjectivity Statement

I began my teaching career as a master teacher (graduate student in a primary teaching role, responsible for curriculum and supervision of practicum and student teachers) in a child development laboratory preschool room at a small midwestern university with a large population of international students. I then spent twelve years as a pre-kindergarten teacher in a grant-funded at-risk pre-kindergarten classroom in a rural school district in the same community as the university. The student population in those classrooms reflected the community and the university: diverse ethnicities, multiple languages represented, diverse physical and mental abilities, and diverse family structures. I continued working in a similar program as a classroom coordinator/parent educator for a couple of years, when I moved to another community to follow my husband to his job. These classrooms were in a different region of the same state; they also had a diverse student population (culturally, socio-economically, linguistically, and physically). I returned to the classroom in the third year we were in that location. I then took seven years off when we lived in Minnesota and returned to the same type of classroom when we relocated to Illinois again. Again, this classroom was in a different region of the state but continued to serve diverse student populations (culturally, linguistically, socio-economically, and physically).

For 18 years, I worked with a diverse student population classified as at-risk for academic failure. These students had varying ethnicities, native languages, abilities/disabilities, and family structures. I used diverse, multicultural, and culturally relevant children's literature to represent the students in each classroom during daily read-alouds. It simply made sense that my students should be exposed to literature that represented their experiences or broadened their perspectives.

When my bi-racial daughter was born, and I began reading to her, I continued to see the effects of being able to see oneself represented in the books we chose—representation matters. Her excitement when a character looked like her or had similar experiences fueled her desire to learn to read. At fourteen, she loves to read and continues to seek books with diverse characters and perspectives. When she was diagnosed as hard of hearing at three-and-a-half, it became even more essential to find books with characters who had similar experiences. She needed to see that she wasn't alone in this new and overwhelming reality of having to wear hearing aids.

I currently teach a pre-K-2 literacy methods course at a mid-sized midwestern university. An assignment in the class asks students to select and critically review a diverse children's literature book based on pre-determined criteria. The enthusiasm for this assignment has caused me to wonder if practicing teachers continue to choose high-quality, diverse children's literature for their students. The undergraduate elementary education teaching candidates seemed to grasp the significance of sharing literature representative of their students, which could provide a window into another person's experience. Do they carry that recognition into their classrooms? I wondered if they continued to be enthusiastic about choosing diverse books to share with their students once they had their own classrooms. This assignment led me to my research topic: "How do teachers make decisions about the books they select for whole-class read-alouds outside the regular curriculum?" Teachers are often bound by their grade-level-mandated curriculum and don't stray too far from those book selections for instruction. However, when choosing to read books for their students' pleasure, do they choose culturally relevant and diverse books?

The Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research is the best fit when one is interested in knowing about and improving one's practice (Merriam et al., 2015). With a focus on meaning in context (Merriam et al., 2015), qualitative research uses interviews to gather information from educators in the field. It helped me understand the interviewees' perspectives. Further, qualitative researchers tend to view their data cyclically, allowing me to derive meaning from the ideas they represent (Saldaña, 2021). Data coding doesn't end with one pass through the information gathered from the research process; I revisited the data, in some cases combining categories to identify themes and, in some cases, creating subcodes or narrower categories to identify themes. Qualitative data analysis is non-linear; researchers don't follow a narrow path when analyzing and interpreting the collected data (Bhattacharya, 2017). Instead, they revisit the data, coding, recoding, analyzing, and identifying themes across multiple interactions with the researcher's dataset. Generalization of the data is not the goal; instead, the goal is to understand a distinct occurrence related to the stated research purpose and, from there, draw conclusions about the participants and their lived experiences.

There are standards related to qualitative research, such as "Is this a worthy topic?" (Tracy, 2010). Understanding the types of books available to students and whether they represent their experiences or expose them to different perspectives, allowing learners to see themselves in text and encounter alternative views (Sharp & Johnston, 2016), helps the researcher identify the factors affecting teachers and their decisions. Culturally and linguistically diverse students need to understand lives beyond their own, and introducing them to diverse children's literature and fully engaging them as participants in literate communities will allow them to become productive members of society (Callins, 2006). It is a worthy topic if the research can pinpoint how teachers

make decisions when choosing books to share with their students. Acknowledging the influences teachers face may enable the researcher to consider possible supports or interventions to encourage the selection of diverse texts for sharing.

In terms of rigorous scholarship (Tracy, 2010), the research question is grounded in sound theoretical constructs. Strict criteria have been established to identify participants who can provide the most valuable data related to the research question.

I monitored subjectivity throughout the interviews, ensuring biases and experiences did not affect the questions or participants' responses. Subjectivity was monitored using a reflexive journal. Journal entries will be kept for each interview, focused on my reactions to the data and participants, as well as on personal reflections before, during, and after the interviews.

I maintained meaningful coherence by aligning the research purpose with the theoretical perspective and methodological framework. The intention was to connect the literature on the importance of using and including children's literature representing diverse cultures and circumstances with teachers' choices when sharing books with their students.

Research Design

This basic qualitative research study (Merriam et al., 2015) examined teachers employed in five school districts in Kansas and Illinois. Four school districts were in mid-sized communities with universities, and one was located on a military base (adjacent to a university). Two interviews per participant (Appendices D & E) generated enough data to understand teachers' decisions. The interviews focused on a specific time and location to understand what the participants were experiencing and the choices they made. The current cultural and political climate and how both affected teachers' classroom decisions were examined through the interview protocol.

The study focused on participants' responses, specifically the factors influencing their decisions about which books to read to their students. It would not be appropriate to generalize the results and claim that all teachers make these choices. This study explored the how and why behind the choices made by specific teachers employed in five different midwestern school districts.

This basic qualitative research study used an interview protocol to collect data from participants (Merriam et al., 2015). Individual interviews were conducted in person or via Zoom with classroom teachers in kindergarten to second grade. Before the first interview, teachers completed a Qualtrics survey focused on their background and training. The first interview questions (Appendix E) focused on the decisions they made when choosing books for their classroom libraries, the factors that influenced those decisions, and whether the books were representative of the students in the school and offered diverse perspectives not represented by their students. Before the second interview, I asked teachers to gather the books they typically choose for read-alouds in their classrooms. Questions during the second interview (Appendix F) focused on the books and the factors that influenced teachers' selection of those books.

Participant Selection

I recruited some of the teachers through the local school district in the mid-size midwestern university town where I lived and attended graduate school. The local school district required a research request form to be completed before conducting research within the district, and upon completion, they provided a list of recommended teachers to interview. I was able to connect with four teachers on their list. Two of the participants taught in Illinois school districts where I once taught. A principal (and a former student's parent) recommended a single participant from a single-school school district. A colleague/committee member recommended

one participant from the local military base; she then recommended two of her colleagues for me to interview. Teachers were initially contacted via email with an explanation of the study and a request to schedule an interview (Appendix B). Follow-up emails were sent as necessary. Teachers participated in an in-person interview or via Zoom. My goal was to interview 12 teachers in kindergarten through second grade. I was able to secure 10 teachers to interview. Participants were offered the option to choose an alias and be referred to in the findings by their alias or the grade level they teach.

Research Site

Four participants taught at four different elementary schools, kindergarten through fifth grade, in a mid-sized midwestern university town. District A has a student population of 60.7% white, 16.4% Hispanic, 10% multiracial, 8% African American, 3.9% Asian, .8% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and .3% American Indian/Alaska Native (Kansas State Department of Education, January 14, 2025). District A has used Wonders (n.d.) as its English Language Arts curriculum since 2016-2017 school year (E. Jackson, personal communication, July 17, 2025). They began using iReady for their English Language Arts curriculum for the 2025-2026 school year (A. Falmier, personal communication, February 17, 2025). Three participants teach at an elementary school on a local military base. District B has a student population that is 48% white, 21% Hispanic, 15% African American, 11% multi-racial, 2% Asian, 2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian (Kansas State Department of Education, January 14, 2025). 50.3% of the population is military-affiliated (Kansas State Department of Education, January 14, 2025). District B currently uses Wonders (n.d.) as its English Language Arts curriculum. One participant was employed in District C. They are currently using Fountas and Pinnell (2026) as their English Language Arts curriculum (Jane, personal communication,

September 10, 2025). District C has a student population of 56.4% white, 15.4% African American, 11.4% Hispanic, 9.6% Asian, 6.7% multi-racial, and .5% American Indian students (Illinois Report Card, 2025). One participant was employed in District D. The school district uses Wonders (2026) as its curriculum (Julia, personal communication, September 8, 2025). District D has a student population of 51% African American, 24.8% white, 10.8% Hispanic, 10.3% multi-racial, and 2.9% Asian students (Illinois Report Card, 2025). One participant was employed at District E (a stand-alone district (pre-k to 5) with students feeding into District D for 6th grade and beyond). District E has a student population of 55.5% white, 17.7% African American, 13.4% Hispanic, 7.7% multi-racial, and 4.9% Asian students (Illinois Report Card, 2025). At the time of the study, District E did not have an ELA curriculum that all elementary teachers were using. Lillian reported that she and another 1st grade teacher were using Rooted in Reading (Lemons, 2022) as their curriculum (Lillian, personal communication, September 23, 2025). In her first year of teaching, she and the other teacher paid for this curriculum; this year, the district is covering any associated costs. Interviews were conducted at participants' home schools (when local) or via Zoom at a mutually agreed time between the participant and the interviewer.

As a former public-school teacher, I might have been considered an insider by the participants. However, as a graduate student working towards a Ph.D., that status could have also placed me in an outsider role.

Data Collection

Data for this basic qualitative research study were two rounds of semi-structured interviews with participants (Bernard, 1998). In-person interviews were recorded using Zoom with a passcode-protected login. Virtual interviews were recorded via Zoom (using a passcode-

protected link). Interview subjects were asked to choose an alias to be used throughout data collection, interpretation, and reporting. Initial transcriptions were created through Zoom and uploaded to the Otter.ai website after the interviews were recorded. I took light notes during the interviews to prompt follow-up questions, record impressions, and book titles when mentioned. The questions provided the flexibility to follow a line of inquiry based on participant responses. Before the first interview, participants were provided with a consent letter to participate in the study (Appendix C), and a Qualtrics survey (Appendix D) collected their background information. Collecting background information on the participants allowed me to sort responses by number of years taught, educational background, and/or grade level currently taught. The first round of questions (Appendix E) focused on factors influencing their book selection, their access to books, and the barriers they perceive when selecting books. The second round of interviews (Appendix F) clarified questions about information gained from the first round and asked teachers to share a selection of recent book titles they've read to their students and how they chose those books. The intended purpose of the book selection conversation was to gain a sense of the types of books teachers were choosing and to explore in more detail the factors influencing their choices.

The interviews were conversational, with time allowing for clarification and expansion of participants' answers. For most interviews, there was a one- to two-week gap between rounds one and two. The debrief statement (Appendix G) was shared with participants after each round of interviews. Whether in person or via Zoom, each interview was recorded and uploaded to Otter.ai for transcription. The interviews were recorded on a password-protected laptop. I used a notebook to take hand-written notes during the interviews to identify prompts for future inquiry or clarification. The notebook was kept in a locked file box when not used for analysis.

All protocols mandated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) were followed, as per training on conducting research with human subjects. Participants in this study could remain anonymous by choosing pseudonyms. They are identified by their pseudonym and grade level. Participants were aware of the study's purpose; all interview questions focused on it and the topic being investigated.

Data Management and Analysis

The data was kept confidential and secure on a password-protected laptop and in a notebook stored in a locked file box. The transcripts were imported into MAXQDA as separate files to facilitate theme identification and coding. MAXQDA was used to sort, code, and analyze data from the interviews with the elementary teachers.

After each interview, the transcripts and notes were reviewed, and irrelevant information was cleaned up. An initial read-through of the transcript was done once to get a sense of the interview and refresh my memory of what was discussed. An open coding process was used, line by line, to highlight meaningful phrases and sentences and assign codes. Next, I looked for patterns and merged similar codes under broader themes as they emerged, dropping redundant codes while ensuring they were supported by the data and aligned with my research question. The goal was for the themes created to be responsive to the research question, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitive to the data, and conceptually congruent (Merriam et al., 2015). I used a constant comparative method of data analysis (Merriam et al., 2015). Themes were created during the initial review of the transcripts. The purpose was to identify responses that aligned with the research purpose and questions, and to create themes from the responses.

The constant comparative method (Merriam et al., 2015) allowed me to identify categories (at least 2) and then create themes that reflect the microsystems (immediate classroom

environment), mesosystems (teachers' relationships with families and colleagues), exosystems (school policies and community resources), macrosystems (cultural and societal influences), and chronosystems (how their beliefs have changed over time) that affect how they are choosing the books they are reading to their students. Once the data were entered and transcribed, they either supported or contradicted the Ecological Systems Framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thematic analysis is "a flexible analytic method that enables the researcher to construct themes - meaning-based patterns" (Terry & Hayfield, 2021, p. 3) that will be used to report the researcher's interpretation of the qualitative data gathered through various methods, including interviews.

I examined how the systems described in the theoretical framework affect the participants' decisions. The themes and categories developed during data analysis enabled me to conduct a thematic analysis of the participants' responses (Merriam et al., 2015). Using thematic analysis and narrative summaries shaped the reporting of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis allowed me to identify and present key interview themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which were illustrated in tables showing how the factors within the theoretical framework affect the participants (Merriam et al., 2015). Direct quotes from participants were used to link the data with the theoretical framework.

Integrity Measures

Member checks (Merriam et al., 2015) were conducted between the first and second interviews, and after the second interview, by sharing the interview transcripts with coded analysis with participants and asking for clarification and confirmation of their responses. I practiced reflexivity (Merriam et al., 2015), attempting to keep my biases, assumptions, and dispositions in check and to avoid allowing them to affect the research process. Peer debriefing

(Merriam et al., 2015) occurred with colleagues as data were shared during the research process to challenge assumptions I might make and offer alternative perspectives.

Summary

This was a basic qualitative research study (Merriam et al., 2015) exploring how kindergarten, first, and second-grade teachers made decisions about the children's literature they shared with their students during daily or weekly whole-class read-alouds. Factors affecting decision-making were investigated through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. Ten teachers in grades kindergarten through second grade participated in two interviews. The first interview considered the various factors as they related to the framework and further probed their decision-making based on the books they will share during the second interview. Data from the interviews was analyzed by coding responses and identifying themes. Chapter four discusses the research findings.

Chapter 4 – Findings

Purpose Statement

This basic qualitative study (Merriam et al., 2015) explored how kindergarten, first, and second-grade teachers made decisions about the children’s literature they shared with their students during daily or weekly whole-class read-alouds. Specifically, the study examines the immediate and broader systemic influences shaping teachers’ book choices, including classroom dynamics, student needs, school culture, and external policies or expectations. By understanding these influences, the study also aims to identify the challenges teachers face and potential supports that could help them incorporate culturally diverse literature into their teaching practice. The participants in this study were practicing teachers employed in kindergarten, first, and second-grade classrooms.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this study was: “How do teachers make decisions about the books they select for whole-class read-alouds outside the regular curriculum?”

More specifically, the study explored:

- How do classroom-level factors—such as student interests, reading levels, and social-emotional needs—shape teachers’ book selections?
- How do relationships with families and the school community influence teachers’ choices?
- How do broader systemic factors, such as school policies, district guidelines, or resource access, impact the books teachers choose to share?
- How do societal trends and cultural movements impact teachers’ professional decision-making regarding read-aloud selections?

- How have teachers' book choices evolved throughout their teaching careers, and what experiences or influences have contributed to these shifts?

Participants

The teachers in this study (Table 4.1) were employed in two school districts in Kansas and three in Illinois. Ten teachers participated in two interviews. Participants were employed teaching grades Kindergarten (2), First (4), or Second (4). All districts were near a university. One district was located on a military base and adjacent to a university community. In that district, the teachers were all employed at one of the elementary schools on the military base. One teacher participated in two in-person interviews. Two teachers participated in a combo of one in-person and one Zoom interview, and seven participated in two Zoom interviews. The decision to conduct in-person or Zoom interviews was based on my proximity to the teacher and the teacher's availability. The interviewees' teaching experience ranged from 2 years to 43 years. Collectively, the participants had an average of 17 years of experience. Six participants held master's degrees with additional certifications, and the remaining four held bachelor's degrees. One teacher (in first grade) held an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement. Teacher demographics are illustrated in the table below, including name, grade level, years of experience, level of education, and the district where they are employed.

Table 0.1 Teacher Demographics

Teacher Name	Grade Level	Years of Experience	Level of education	District/State
Simone	Kindergarten	2	B.S.	District A
Lillian	1 st grade	2	B.S.	District E
Vivienne	2 nd grade	3	B.S.	District B
Charlotte	Kindergarten	7	B.S.	District B
Kate	2 nd grade	8	M.S. + additional certifications	District A
Sloane	1 st grade	17	M.S. + additional certifications	District A
Jane	2 nd grade	26	M.S.	District C
Julia	2 nd grade	29	M.S.	District D
Abi	1 st grade	31	M.S. + additional certifications	District A
Bea	1 st grade	43	M.S. + additional certifications	District B

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis to review transcripts from the two interviews per participant. The constant comparative method (Merriam et al., 2015) allowed me to identify categories (at least 2) and then create themes that reflected the microsystems (immediate classroom environment), mesosystems (teachers' relationships with families and colleagues), exosystems (school policies and community resources), macrosystems (cultural and societal influences), and chronosystems (how their beliefs have changed over time) that affected how they were choosing the books they were reading to their students.

Findings

I conducted two interviews with each participant. The first interview questions (Appendix E) focused on the ecological systems that might have impacted their decision-making when choosing read-alouds. For the second interview, I asked each participant to share eight to ten books they typically read aloud to their students. I did not specify a timeframe for when they

would have read these books. Some teachers picked books they'd already read that school year (interviews were conducted in September and early October), and others picked books they would read at some point during the school year. Most of the teachers gathered more than ten books to share with me. Questions in the second interview (Appendix F) asked participants whether and how the books fit specific contexts related to the ecological systems identified by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

First Interview – Discussion of Factors

A review of the first-round interview transcripts identified themes that repeatedly appeared in the teachers' responses (Table 4.2). The themes identified were the reasons teachers chose books to share during read-aloud time. Following the constant comparative method (Merriam et al., 2015), I identified four primary themes that appeared in the majority of responses (50% or more): grade-appropriate, social-emotional, culturally relevant, and current issues. Three minor themes appeared in 20% or more of the responses: social awareness/social justice, evolution over the course of their teaching careers, and classic books. Social-emotional themes are like teaching life skills and assisting with classroom management, as identified by Ross (2017) and Giles & Morrison (2023). When the teachers mentioned choosing age-appropriate books, they also cited student interest as a factor, in contrast to Astolfi's (2023) results. Lemke (2020) focused specifically on the use of multicultural literature; teachers in this study identified using books to promote diversity and inclusion as one of their primary reasons for choosing particular titles. Three of the primary themes included sub-themes. I grouped empathy and understanding/managing emotions into the social-emotional category. I grouped cultural differences, socio-economic status, and military connectedness into the culturally relevant category. Classic books included titles such as *Rosie's Walk* (Hutchins, 1968), *The*

Wonderful Wizard of Oz (Baum, 1900), and *The Snowy Day* (Keats, 1962). The table below illustrates the themes identified during interviews in round one, along with the number of teachers (out of ten) who mentioned each theme as influencing their read-aloud choices.

Table 0.2 Identified Themes & Sub-Themes

Theme: Sub-Themes	Number of teachers mentioning in the interview (out of 10)
Appropriate for grade level	10
Culturally Relevant	8
Social-emotional: build empathy, understanding, and manage emotions	7
Evolution over a teaching career to choose more inclusive books	6
Social Justice/social awareness	4
Current issues	3
Classic books	2

Classroom Level Factors

Classroom-level factors include influences in a teacher’s immediate environment. These influences are separate from the teacher’s preferences and personal agenda, which may also impact their decision-making but were not a focus of this study. When viewed through the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, classroom-level factors are within a teacher’s microsystem. The results of this study indicated that choosing age-appropriate books for students and books that meet or teach social-emotional needs or skills are classroom-level factors.

Appropriate for Grade Level

The theme of choosing books (and topics) appropriate for their grade level was mentioned by all teachers at some point in the interview process. Age-appropriate books have accessible language, an engaging story, characters students can relate to, authentic representation

of cultures and ideas, and can often be used across the curriculum (Cunningham, 2016). Examining books to determine whether they are appropriate for the age/grade level of their students falls under a teacher's microsystem. Charlotte (kindergarten) shared that she "(is) always thinking about what is appropriate to share with kindergartners." Books with accessible language and an engaging story would be appropriate for kindergarten students. Some topics that teachers considered appropriate and relevant included holidays and community events (such as deployments). Kate (2nd grade) was focused on finding books she thought would capture her students' interest (engaging story). Julia (2nd grade) chooses books with characters that represent her students (relatable characters). Sloane (1st grade) makes sure to pre-read the books she chooses to share with her students so she can determine whether they are appropriate. As a second-year teacher, Lillian (1st grade) seemed to be still figuring out which books are appropriate for her students. She mentioned she wouldn't repeat books that students from her first year didn't find engaging.

Social-emotional Considerations

Students' social-emotional needs are influences that fall within a teacher's microsystem and are considered classroom-level factors. The teachers I interviewed seemed very attuned to their students' social-emotional needs, including building empathy and understanding/managing emotions. Kate (2nd grade) mentioned using illustrated children's books to help her students role-play scenarios involving emotions and social-emotional skills. Jane (2nd grade) considered how well-regulated her students are before sharing specific books with the class. She recognized that some topics wouldn't resonate with her students if they were feeling a particular way, and she may have to reserve that title for another day. Vivienne (1st grade) chose books that she thinks her students can relate to and that focus on social-emotional skills. Kindergarten teacher Simone

considered how long her students could sit for a read-aloud and what their current social-emotional needs were before choosing a book. She mentioned that her goals were to “teach students how to exist in our world” and to “shape them into people who like to learn.” Jane was also concerned with teaching students who can interact positively with others. “Overall, in today’s world, just believing in yourself, having that positive outlook. Being open to other people with different views, (and) being able to have an open conversation. But, having that open mindset towards others and towards yourself.” Sloane (1st grade) mentioned wanting to help set her students up for success at the beginning of the year by using children’s literature to focus on positive behaviors across different areas of the school, such as *Manners on the Playground* (Finn, 2007). Bea (1st grade) acknowledged that she often chose books to reinforce social-emotional skills, but was primarily interested in introducing students to classic illustrated picture books and in whether each book could reinforce a reading skill she was teaching. Classic books she mentioned were *The Little House* (Burton, 1978), *Fish is Fish* (Lionni, 1970), *A Birthday for Frances* (Hoban, 1994), and books by Mercer Mayer (published between 1983 and 2015).

Relationships with Families and School Community Factors

A teacher’s mesosystem includes relationships with their students’ families and the school community. Getting to know their students’ families and becoming familiar with their school community informs the teacher’s selection of books for the classroom read-aloud. As teachers get to know their students’ families and communities, they can identify books that might be culturally relevant to their students. Collaboration with colleagues is a school-community factor that was not as frequently mentioned by teachers but falls under the mesosystem.

Culturally Relevant

Children's literature that is considered culturally relevant can cover an array of topics, including ethnicity, race, culture, languages, sexuality/gender, disabilities, socioeconomic status, dialect variances, and family structures (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). Family structures, a student's native culture, their socio-economic status, and connection to the military fall into a teacher's mesosystem and were mentioned most often by teachers in their interviews. Charlotte (kindergarten) talked about how impactful a connection to the military was for her students, how deployments affected them, and when a family has a PCS (permanent change of station) and a student must move away from or into their classroom mid-year. She chose books to help her students process what those changes mean. First-grade teacher Julie said her goal was

. . . trying to pull . . . different family situations in as well as race diversity into my classroom so that they can see themselves in the book or see something different and learn that it is also normal, even if it is not your situation.

Other teachers echoed this sentiment throughout the interviews. First-grade teacher, Vivienne, shared that she wants to "find ways to represent . . . all different demographics in a way that children can relate to, but not feel pushed into . . . this is what I should be doing." Julia, a second-grade teacher, stressed that she looks for characters in books who represent her students and that she considers the different family dynamics and the low socio-economic status of many of them. When discussing family dynamics, several teachers mentioned single-parent households, multi-generational households where perhaps a grandparent was the primary caregiver, and same-sex parent households. They would look for books that portrayed the different family structures in a positive light. When discussing diversity of their students, Julia, a second-grade teacher, chose books that had characters that represented her students, while Kate, a second-grade teacher,

shared that “a lot of the stories I choose are animals ... it takes away skin color ... (the students can) identify with character traits.”

Collaboration with Colleagues

Interaction with co-workers also falls under a teacher’s mesosystem; most said they collaborate very little with co-workers when considering books for a read-aloud. Vivienne (1st grade) talked about collaborating with co-workers during PLC (Professional Learning Communities) time and week-planning meetings, but did not specifically mention discussing books. PLC times are typically grade-level specific; they involve ongoing collective inquiry and action research to better serve the student population (ALLTHINGSPLC, n.d.). Julia (2nd grade) mentioned she loves to share recommendations with other teachers when she or her students have enjoyed a particular book. Jane (2nd grade) mentioned that a read-aloud is a personal choice, often influenced by a teacher’s or a student’s connection to the topic, which seemed to indicate that collaboration was not a factor for her.

Broader Systemic Factors: School Policies, District Guidelines, Access to Resources

Broader systemic factors are found in the exosystem, influencing a teacher’s choice of read-alouds. These include access to resources, school policies, and district guidelines. Each teacher was asked about their access to resources, and this is discussed below. When asked about school policies or district guidelines that might restrict or guide their book choices, each teacher indicated that there were no policies or guidelines in place that dictated the types of books they could read to their students.

Access to Resources

Teachers are not affected by a lack of access to resources (exosystem); on the contrary, they talked about using their school libraries and public libraries and curating their personal

collections of books for classroom use. Teachers in Kansas highlighted the availability of books in their school libraries and the willingness of their school librarians to find books that met their needs. The teachers in Illinois discussed access to their public libraries and their personal book collections. They have school libraries in Illinois, but they mentioned them more in the context of students using them. Julia (2nd grade, Illinois) specifically mentioned purchasing books for her classroom. The librarian in her building is a para-professional, not a certified employee (Kate, personal communication, 9/8/2025). Kate (2nd grade, Kansas) described her building librarian as very conscientious about the types of books in the building library and as someone who always tried to obtain titles that represent a variety of perspectives for students to enjoy. The librarian in Kate's building is a certified teacher (with 20+ years of experience) and has a master's degree in library science (Paula, personal communication, 9/10/25). All but one teacher (the 2nd-year kindergarten teacher, excluded) talked about their personal collection of books, curated over the years, that they share with their students. Simone (2nd year, kindergarten) was mindful of the costs of teaching and seemed content to use resources available through the school and public libraries. Bea (1st grade), with the most years of experience (43), had originally retired after 40 years in the classroom and had donated or sold most of her personal collection. She returned to the classroom after a three-year hiatus and had been teaching again for three years at the time of the interview. She admitted to not being as familiar with "newer character books" and that she was having to rely on her school library for most of the books she shared in her classroom. She mentioned being familiar with books from the previous curriculum she taught under (different from her current one) and that she would pull those books to use in her classroom.

Impact of Societal Trends & Cultural Movements

A teacher's macrosystem includes the broader society in which they live, cultural movements that may impact teaching and learning, and current issues. In some parts of the United States, there has been a societal shift towards more book bans in recent years (Blakemore, 2024). Wary of this trend, teachers mentioned focusing on books they had determined were age-appropriate for their students. Book bans could also be considered a cultural movement.

Social Justice/Social Awareness

When asked about the impact of broader societal issues (macrosystem), the teachers acknowledged they were aware of the controversy surrounding books in other states (book bans, etc.) and were cautious about introducing topics that could be considered controversial (which the teachers left mostly undefined). Sloane (1st grade) stressed that she was focused on "helping them (her students) become good people" and that she was "mindful of how characters are portrayed" in the stories she reads. Sloane did not elaborate on what she meant by "become good people," but her book selections focused on using manners, regulating emotions, and interacting with others in a positive manner. Kate (2nd grade) mentioned that she gets to know her students and their families, and that helps guide her book choices; she doesn't "feel impacted by book bans or societal pressures." Charlotte (kindergarten) says if she has "a student with two mommies" (as an example), she'll be mindful of the types of families represented in the books she chooses to share.

Current Issues

Teachers who mentioned current issues affecting their book selection stressed that they still considered whether a topic was grade- or age-appropriate for their students. Current issues reside within a teacher's macrosystem, which includes their awareness of how broader societal influences and implications affect their choices. Holidays and elections dominated their mentions

as “current issues.” Julia (2nd grade) mentioned that she uses children’s literature to discuss civil rights issues with her students. When reflecting on Banks’ (2018) approaches to sharing literature, most teachers seemed to use a contribution approach, except for Julia, who shared titles that reflected an additive approach. This made sense as 50% of the students in her school district identify as African American (Illinois Report Card, 2026).

Evolution Over Teaching Career

To maintain a teaching certificate in Illinois and Kansas, teachers must participate in professional development or take college courses related to their teaching certificate for credit (ksde.gov, n.d., & isbe.net, n.d.). Professional development is offered at the district level through designated days, and attendance is often mandatory. Attendance at academic conferences is also considered professional development and is typically voluntary. Six of the teachers had earned their master’s degrees, and one had an additional endorsement (English Speakers of Other Languages) at the time of the interviews. Teachers in the interview pool joined the profession in every decade from 1980 to 2020. It seemed reasonable to concur that, over time, a teacher’s selection of books for read-alouds might evolve and that they might be influenced by professional development and educational activities they participated in.

Years of Experience

The teachers I interviewed had between 2 and 43 years of classroom experience (chronosystem). Three of the teachers were early-career teachers (with 5 years or less), and the remaining seven had 7 or more years of classroom experience. When asked to reflect on their teaching career and whether their book choices had evolved, six of the seven veteran teachers acknowledged that they were choosing books differently than they used to. Sloane (1st grade, 17 years’ experience) mentioned that since becoming a mom, she has been choosing books to share

that her children enjoy and have introduced to her. Abi (1st grade, 31 years' experience) earned her English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement early in her career and realized she needed to include books that reflected her students' experiences. She also wanted to "show kids that the world is a bigger place than this community" and included books that would act as a window or sliding door (Sims, 1990) for her students. Jane (2nd grade, 26 years' experience) reflected that the current selections of children's books were more diverse than when she first began teaching. She uses her personal experiences and those of her students to introduce a variety of books to share with them. Bea (1st grade, 43 years' experience) stressed that she's "become more intentional with experience" in how she chooses books. The three early-career teachers also noticed a shift in how they choose books from their first year of teaching. They mentioned tailoring their selections to their students' needs (which would/could shift each year). Overall, the teachers seemed to recognize that their students' needs, interests, and experiences may change from year to year, and they adapted their book selections to match their current class.

Second Interviews – Discussion of Books

During the second round of interviews, teachers shared more than 100 book titles with me (Appendix H). The books fell into six broad categories: social-emotional, diverse/culturally relevant, current issues, social justice, socio-economic status, and classics. Books were placed in specific categories based on the overarching theme they addressed. I followed the teachers' leads as they shared the books and described how they used them in the classroom when placing titles in specific categories, while also recognizing that many could be cross-categorized. If a book contained characters that could be labeled as diverse/culturally relevant, the overarching theme was a social-emotional skill, and the teacher specifically mentioned the title in relation to

teaching or reinforcing that skill, then I placed that title in the social-emotional category. A book might contain diverse/culturally relevant characters but address socio-economic status and access to resources, so it went in the socio-economic status category.

Just like the teachers' responses in Interview 1 articulated the different systems that affect their choices, their book selections in Interview 2 also speak to the different systems identified by Bronfenbrenner in his Ecological Systems Theory (1979). Books that address social-emotional skills and needs would be found in a teacher's microsystem, as they address the immediate influences a teacher faces daily in the classroom. Diverse and culturally relevant books fall within a teacher's mesosystem because they reflect the interconnections teachers make with their students' families and their community. None of the categories of books shared directly addressed the exosystem, which includes indirect external influences such as school policies or access to books. The macrosystem, with its focus on the broader cultural and societal context, includes books that address current issues, social justice issues, and socio-economic status. Finally, changes over time, the chronosystem, are addressed by the teachers' recognitions that there is more availability of diverse titles now than when they first began teaching, as discussed in Chapter 4, but also in their desire to share books that have withstood the test of time and are considered classics.

Books addressing social-emotional issues and culturally relevant/diverse themes were shared most often during the interview process. Books in each category had human or non-human/animal main characters. The books with non-human or animal main characters that teachers highlighted displayed human characteristics and addressed human emotions and situations. Kate (1st grade) explained why she chose to use books with animals as the main characters in her classroom as "a lot of the stories I choose are animal . . . takes away skin color .

.. (the students can) identify with character traits” that the animals exhibit. It seemed that she felt that by choosing books with animals as the main characters, any student could relate to the story’s message or theme. She also shared book titles featuring diverse human characters: *Worries Are Not Forever* (Verdick, 2018), *Speak Up, Molly Lou Melon* (Lovell, 2020), *Where Are You From?* (Mendez, 2019), and *What should Danny do?* (Levy, 2017). On the other hand, Charlotte (1st grade), shared many titles with non-human/animal characters that dealt with human emotions and the characters displayed human characteristics: *The Bad Seed* (John, 2017), *The Couch Potato* (John, 2020), *Worrysaurus* (Bright, 2000), *Grumpy Monkey Up All Night* (Lang, 2020), and *The Very Impatient Caterpillar* (Burach, 2019) were a few examples. Charlotte did not provide a rationale for choosing these books over others.

Social-emotional Considerations - Microsystem

The books in this category were used by teachers to build self-esteem/confidence, introduce conflict-resolution strategies, foster a growth mindset, support self-regulation, manage emotions, and identify social cues. The titles mentioned were almost evenly split between human and non-human/animal main characters. Titles mentioned by various teachers include *Fail-A-Bration* (Montague, 2024), *Interrupting Chicken* (Stein, 2010), *We Don’t Eat Our Classmates* (Higgins, 2018), *Wemberly Worried* (Henkes, 2000), *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (Viorst, 1972), *The Bad Seed* (John, 2017), *The Good Egg* (John, 2019) and *My Mouth is a Volcano* (Cook, 2005). Jane (2nd grade) seemed to sum up the goal of all of the teachers for using children’s books to teach social-emotional skills when she said,

Overall, in today’s world, just believing in yourself, having that positive outlook... being open to other people with different views, being able to have an open conversation. (It’s important) . . . having that open mindset towards others and towards yourself.

Abi (1st grade) stressed that she uses books to reinforce the idea that it's "okay to be yourself" and to be "accepting" of others who are different from her. She liked *Fiona Flamingo* (Chu, 2019) and *The Proudest Blue* (Ali & Muhammed, 2019) to illustrate those concepts for her first graders. Vivienne (2nd grade) used *We Don't Eat Our Classmates* (Higgins, 2018) to discuss "emotional regulation" and "recognizing social cues." Lillian (1st grade) liked to use *Interrupting Chickens* (Stein, 2010) when her first graders were having difficulty with listening and turn-taking in conversation. Jane (2nd grade) mentioned using *Bubblegum Brain* (Cook, 2017) to discuss having a growth mindset and why it was important to "believe in themselves." Kate (2nd grade) used *My Strong Mind* (van Hove, 2017) and *Speak Up, Molly Lou Melon* (Lovell, 2020) to teach having a growth mindset in her classroom. Sloane (1st grade) used the *Manners* series by Carrie Finn (2007) to teach expectations for the playground, classroom, library, and cafeteria.

Diverse/Culturally Relevant Titles - Mesosystem

In her first interview, Vivienne (1st grade) said she wanted her classroom to feel like a "safe space" for her students. In her second interview, she shared some book titles she used to help students feel it was okay to be different, to be themselves, and to be who they were meant to be. *Not Quite Narwhal* (Sima, 2017), *Thelma the Unicorn* (Blabey, 2015), *My Shadow is Purple* (Stuart, 2022), *Beautiful as You Are* (Tave, 2019), and *Not Quite Snow White* (Franklin, 2023) portray characters (human and animal) that are trying to figure out how to fit in because they are different from their peers. Abi (1st grade) said it was important to "see characters with different needs and abilities" and that she would not hesitate to "share books with diverse family structures" that featured "bi-racial or same sex" couples. Jane (2nd grade) mentioned that some of her students lived in multi-generational households or with a grandparent (instead of their parents), and that she tried to share books with diverse family structures. Kate (2nd grade) used

the book *Where Are You From?* (Méndez, 2019) with a multi-generational relationship as the primary focus, and diverse characters representing various family structures with her students.

In her first interview, Jane said it was important for her students to understand that “diversity is more than skin color.” *The Reflection in Me* by Marc Colagiovanni (2024) was an example of a book she likes to share that highlights that what is important and what makes us unique and wonderful is what is inside of us; we are more than the color of our skin. Sloane (1st grade) liked to include holidays her students might celebrate at home in her classroom, specifically Hanukkah. Kate (2nd grade) used the book *Halal Hot Dogs* (Aziz, 2021) to help her Muslim students feel represented in the classroom. Charlotte (kindergarten) teaches on the military base and has high student mobility. She liked using the book *I Wish You More* (Krouse Rosenthal, 2015) to help her students cope with the constant transitions as classmates came and went from the classroom. While *I Wish You More* (Krouse Rosenthal, 2015) is not considered a diverse text, its messages of encouragement, friendship, and strength seem perfect for a kindergarten child dealing with the sudden move of a friend out of their lives.

Current Issues - Macrosystem

When asked about whether they used texts to discuss current issues with their students and the possible impact those might have on their lives, the teachers mentioned finding books to help them talk about and celebrate Patriot Day (September 11), Constitution Day (September 17), and Election Day (1st Tuesday after the 1st Monday in November). Because the teachers are teaching children between the ages of five and eight, they stressed that they focused on topics that were age-appropriate for their students while also remaining politically neutral. Sloane (1st grade) shared the title *We the Kids* (Catrow, 2001) as one she consistently uses with her students. *We the Kids* (Catrow, 2001) is a kid-focused look at the preamble to the United States

Constitution. During election time, she also likes to use *Duck for President* (Cronin, 2004), a humorous introduction to the voting process for young readers. Abi (1st grade) also mentioned talking about elections in a non-partisan manner when they occur. She did not share any book titles. Jane (2nd grade) focused on poverty as a current issue and its effects on students, sharing books such as *The Orange Shoes* (Noble, 2007) and *The Can Man* (Williams, 2010). These titles could also be under socio-economic status, but I followed the teacher's explanation of how they were used. Julia (2nd grade) considered integrity and bullying to be current issues affecting her students and shared *Mr. Lincoln's Way* (Polacco, 2001) and *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale* (Stephoe, 1987) with them. An argument could be made that integrity and dealing with bullying should be considered social-emotional skills, but the teacher placed those titles under current issues in our interview. Vivienne (2nd grade) talked about highlighting people and holidays in current events and about sharing books about them, such as *Kamala Harris: A Little Golden Book Biography* (LaRocca, 2021) and *Moon's Ramadan* (Kazi, 2023). These titles could also be considered culturally relevant/diverse, but again, I honored where the teacher placed them in the context of our interview and how she used them in the classroom.

Social Justice Considerations - Macrosystem

Teachers primarily focused on social justice issues from the past, using stories such as *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007) a true story from the underground railroad, *White Water* (2015) set in 1962 in segregation-era South, and *This is the Rope* (Woodson, 2017) a story highlighting the Great Migration when millions of African-American families relocated from the South to the North in the United States. Julia (2nd grade) mentioned that she likes to share those titles with her students to discuss inequality and race. While most teachers did not share specific book titles, several mentioned that they discussed Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK, Jr.) during

Black History Month and around his birthday in January each year. This would be considered the contribution approach (Banks, 2018), where one limits the sharing of books from a particular culture or about a specific person to a designated day each year. Simone (kindergarten) shared *Be a King* (Weatherford, 2002), highlighting the principles Martin Luther King, Jr. fought for in a student-friendly manner, as a title she finds age-appropriate for her kindergarten students. While Amy (1st grade) liked to include books that introduce diversity to her students, she was also hesitant to expose them to topics that some might consider controversial (i.e., social justice). She specifically mentioned discussing MLK, Jr., and the impact of his work toward equality, while trying to keep it neutral. She did not elaborate on what she meant by “trying to keep it neutral.” Vivienne (1st grade) didn’t mention specific book titles, but did talk about how, during Black History Month, her students travel to different classrooms in their building to hear different stories and complete an extension activity related to those books. Second-year teacher Lillian (1st grade) shared that she exercised some caution when broaching certain subjects, as she was concerned about potential backlash from parents.

Socio-Economic Status Considerations - Macrosystem

Simone (kindergarten) was very aware of her students and their home environments, noting that some were worried about where their next meal might come from. She shared books like *Broken Crayons Still Color* (Collier, 2023) to highlight how not everyone has access to the same resources, while Julia (2nd grade) used *Each Kindness* (Woodson, 2012) with a message of anti-bullying, and *Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2007) which highlights needs versus wants, and Bea (1st grade) used *A Rose for Abby* (Guthrie, 1988) with a focus on homelessness and how people can help. Jane (2nd grade) used the books *A Chair for My Mother* (Williams, 1982) and *The Can Man* (Williams, 2010) to spark discussion about saving for something that matters to you and about

using your resources. The teachers seemed mostly concerned with helping their students be respectful of others, no matter their circumstances. Sloane (1st grade) mentioned that their social studies curriculum covers “needs vs. wants” and that they have non-fiction books to cover this concept.

Classic Children’s Books - Chronosystem

The veteran teachers (with 5 or more years of experience) discussed wanting to introduce students to books they considered classic children’s literature. The accepted definition of classic children’s literature seems to be books that have withstood the test of time (Sanders, 2023); they are still as relevant today as when they were published. Today’s children might enjoy them as much as children did when they were first published. These classic books fit into the other themes that emerged from the interviews, but were shared in the context of ensuring students were familiar with those titles. While each of the veteran teachers shared several newer titles, it’s worth noting that they’re still choosing classics they are familiar with and comfortable sharing with their students.

Bea (1st grade), with 43 years of experience, thought it was very important that children be exposed to classic books and shared that she was not as familiar with many of the newer titles. She listed titles such as *Millions of Cats* (Gàg, 1928), *The Little House* (Burton, 1942), *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* (Seuss, 1949), *Fish is Fish* (Lionni, 1970), *Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs* (dePaola, 1973), books written by Eric Carle, and the *Biscuit* series of books (Capucilli, 1996). Bea described the books she was choosing as books that would “launch her students into reading.” Her comment makes sense, with the intense focus of teaching students to read at the first-grade level. Julia (2nd grade) included *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (Viorst, 1987), *Ira Sleeps Over* (Waber, 1973), and *Why Mosquitos Buzz in*

People's Ears (Aardema, 1975). Charlotte (1st grade) enjoyed reading *The Wonderful World of the Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900) to her students each year, and Jane (2nd grade) included *A Chair for My Mother* (Williams, 1982) as a classic book she likes to share with her students.

Summary

The data collected from the two interviews provided important insights into the factors that affect teachers' book choices for classroom read-alouds. To summarize, the themes emerging from the data analysis were as follows:

- Each of the teachers interviewed mentioned considering their students' ages when selecting books. They ensured the books' subject matter is age-appropriate. Subsequently, they refrained from introducing certain topics through illustrated picture books because of the students' ages. Classroom-level factors within the microsystem.
- Classroom teachers were focused on their students' social-emotional well-being. They used illustrated children's books to spark discussion about appropriate behavior, managing emotions, developing a growth mindset, and building self-esteem. Classroom-level factors within the microsystem.
- Culturally relevant illustrated children's books were used to support conversations about diversity and inclusion. Teachers were using the books as mirrors, windows, and sliding doors for their students (Sims, 1990). Relationships with students' families and school community factors within the mesosystem.
- Classroom teachers were not impacted by building or school district policies that might restrict or guide the types of books they would choose to share with their students. There appeared to be an overall lack of collaboration with teaching peers

regarding which books to share with their students for the classroom read-aloud.

Broader systemic factors within the exosystem.

- Teachers shared book titles that highlight social justice/social awareness they used in classroom read-alouds. There was an overall sense of hesitancy in sharing anything that might be considered controversial. Current issues were mostly limited to holidays and some people in the news; a couple of teachers felt that some social-emotional skills and socio-economic issues were current issues that their students needed support and instruction in. The impact of societal trends and cultural movements within the macrosystem was significant.
- Over the course of their teaching careers, the teachers' choices had evolved to include more diverse and inclusive titles, and most felt more intentional about their book choices than they did as early-career teachers. The impact of the evolution of their teaching careers within the chronosystem.
- Classic books still held a place in most classrooms, as teachers recognize the value of stories whose themes have stood the test of time and remain relevant to today's learners (Sanders, 2023). The impact of the evolution of their teaching careers within the chronosystem.
- While a few mentioned being aware of the controversy surrounding some book titles, they still paid attention to their students' demographics and decided whether to share a book based on their students' needs.

Teachers were influenced by the people/students they interacted with, the experiences they gained through teaching each year, and, to some extent, by what was happening in the world around them. While teachers mentioned choosing a book because it was familiar or a favorite of

theirs, they repeatedly returned to discussing their students' needs and interests. They were cautious when discussing current events and whether it was appropriate to share books that addressed them. They used a more contribution-based approach (Banks, 2018) when sharing culturally relevant texts. While illustrated picture books span all genres, especially culturally relevant texts, teachers primarily shared fictional books with their students (historical, traditional, and biographical). Only two non-fiction books were mentioned, one about Kamala Harris and one about Frida Kahlo. No illustrated poetry books were mentioned.

Chapter 5 – Interpretations

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to identify factors that influenced early elementary teachers' decisions when selecting illustrated picture books to share during a classroom read-aloud.

The overarching question guiding this study was: "How do teachers make decisions about the books they select for whole-class read-alouds outside the regular curriculum?"

More specifically, the study explored:

- How do classroom-level factors—such as student interests, reading levels, and social-emotional needs—shape teachers' book selections?
- How do relationships with families and the school community influence teachers' choices?
- How do broader systemic factors, such as school policies, district guidelines, or resource access, impact the books teachers choose to share?
- How do societal trends and cultural movements impact teachers' professional decision-making regarding read-aloud selections?
- How have teachers' book choices evolved throughout their teaching careers, and what experiences or influences have contributed to these shifts?

Discussion

The research findings indicate that many factors influenced teachers' book selections for a classroom read-aloud. Teachers are primarily influenced by their students' needs and experiences, a desire to share culturally relevant literature, the communities they teach in, and the length of time they have been teaching. School policies, nationwide book bans, access to

books are not factors that influenced these teachers' selections. When we center teacher choice and consider the factors that influence it, the result is Figure 5.1.

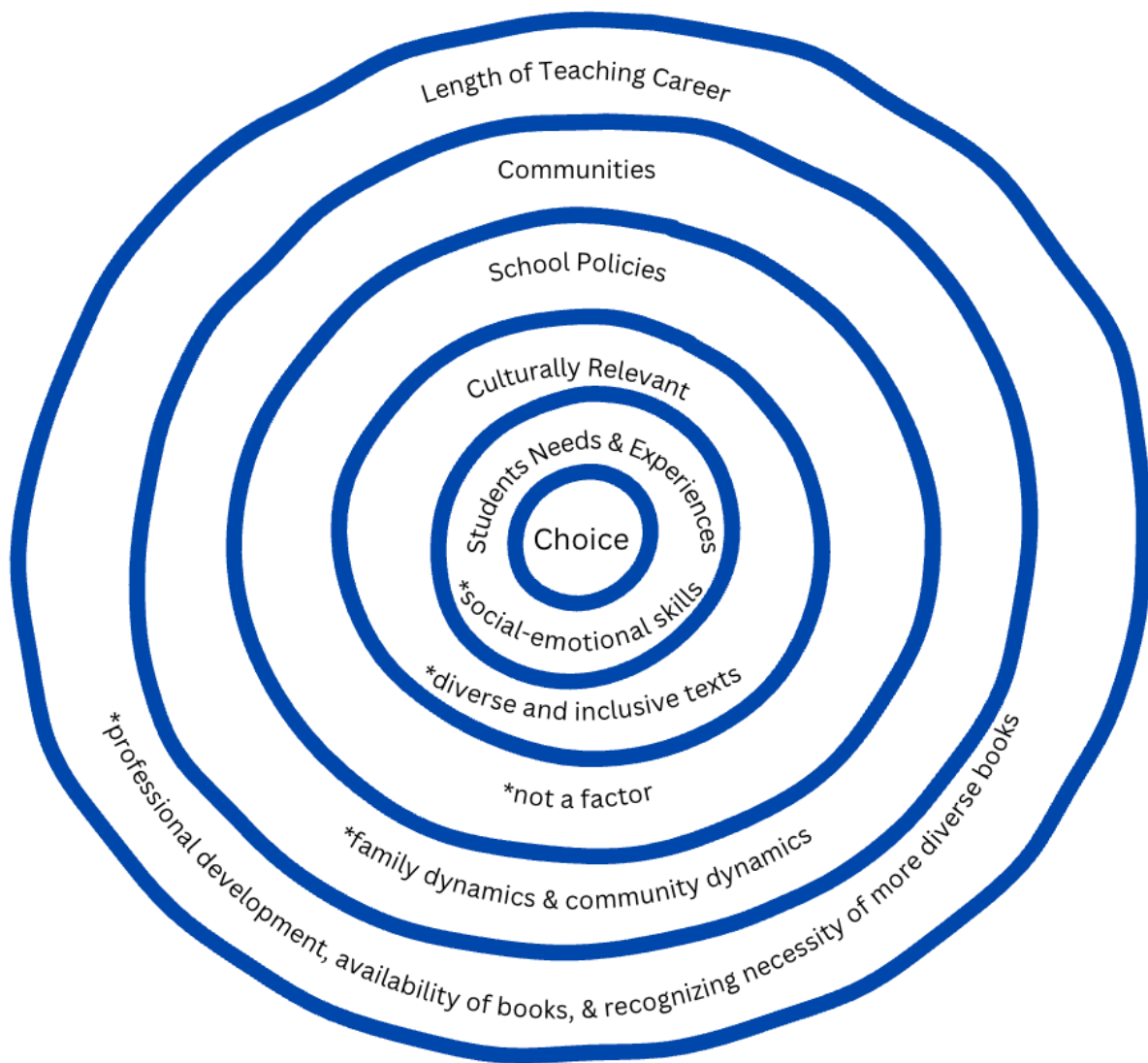


Figure 0-1 Teacher Choice and the Factors Influencing Choice

Teachers seem to be thinking beyond just the text (illustrations, etc.) when making their selections. Illustrated children's books that address social-emotional needs and skills, include narratives that mirror the experiences of their students, promote conversation and discussion of current events/issues in a developmentally appropriate manner, and are considered classics (timeless message) top the lists of books the teachers are using during their read-aloud time. The

classroom teachers who participated in the study were intentional about the books they chose to share with their students. They chose books outside their mandated curriculum, though several mentioned titles they really enjoyed that were included in their curriculum.

Students' Needs and Experiences - Microsystem

When teachers are connected to their students and familiar with their backgrounds, they consider the experiences their students bring to the learning environment and choose books that genuinely reflect the cultures represented and accurately and realistically depict images and events (Delgado, 2021). Intentionally choosing books that represent their students and their experiences allows a teacher to provide a mirror for some students and a window or sliding door for others (Bishop, 1990). Using books to promote social skills and social-emotional awareness during read-alouds helps students deepen their emotional intelligence (Forgan & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2004; Harper & Brand, 2010; Jackson & Panyan, 2002). Understanding the specific social-emotional skills that teachers are focusing on and why they chose those skills could be a follow-up study to this one. When teachers focus on developing students' empathy, they share books that introduce a variety of perspectives (Johnston, 2015). Teachers who ensure that the illustrated children's books they select are developmentally appropriate for their students are recognizing one of Fisher et al.'s (2004) essential components for choosing a book for a read-aloud: selecting books that are developmentally, socially, and age-appropriate for their students and that match their interests.

Culturally Relevant Children's Literature - Mesosystem

That many teachers follow a culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) approach to teaching is evident in the culturally relevant texts they share with their students (Delgado, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sharma & Christ, 2017; Sharp & Johnston, 2016). During the interview process,

the teachers shared titles featuring diverse and inclusive characters and themes, as well as titles written by diverse authors (Fuhrman, 2020). However, they share an almost equal number of books featuring non-humans and animals as the main characters, making their overall selections slightly less diverse. This study revealed that teachers seem to be employing culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) practices as they consider the experiences their students bring to the classroom and the experiences they need to be exposed to when choosing books for a read-aloud. When choosing books with human main characters, the teachers were intentional about using children's literature to provide a window, a mirror, or a sliding door for their students (Bishop, 1990). Their approach to sharing culturally relevant books falls mostly under the contribution approach, with one teacher employing a more additive approach (Banks, 2018). To focus specifically on the culturally relevant books that teachers have access to and choose to use in their classrooms could also be a follow-up to this study.

School/District Policies & Access to Books – Exosystem

School district policies do not seem to affect or limit the books teachers choose. When asked, the teachers seemed unaware that their district might have specific policies that would limit their choices. While book bans have increased in recent years (Blakemore, 2024), the school districts included in this study are not yet restricting which books are available to students and teachers. This was not that surprising to me. I'm familiar with the communities where the teachers teach, having lived in three of the four, and would have been surprised if the administration had started placing restrictions on the types of books teachers could read to their students. However, it is crucial to remember that the political landscape continues to change rapidly. This change often affects school policies at the state and local levels. Teachers indicated that they sometimes worry about the possibility of upsetting a student's family by choosing a

particular book, which in turn affects their book selection. I should note that none of the teachers interviewed had yet to experience this, but they were aware of the possibility and wanted to avoid it. Expanding the interview pool to other states could yield different results, revealing district- or state-level influences on teacher choice.

Teachers mentioned using their personal collections, the public library, and the school library to obtain books for their read-alouds. Access to books seems to be limited only by one's willingness (or lack of) to look for them. Veteran teachers have curated their personal collections over the years to include a variety of books that reflect the themes and categories identified in this study, with one teacher mentioning that she did not want to spend her own money on books. She was a second-year teacher who had received books as gifts from friends and family and was committed to using her school library and the public library.

Community Influences - Macrosystem

Teachers are impacted by the broader community in which they reside when choosing read-aloud books. Whether there is a high incidence of non-traditional family structures or a highly mobile student population, classroom teachers intentionally choose books to help their students feel seen and included (Bishop, 1990; Todd, 2021). Choosing books with characters and settings that feel familiar to readers (Delgado, 2021) indicates that the teacher is familiar with the community in which they teach and with their students' lives. Teachers in districts with mixed socioeconomic statuses in their classrooms were intentional about the books they chose to share with students, highlighting character traits such as helping others, showing empathy, conserving resources, and being happy with what they have. They were intentional in their choices because they were familiar with their students' families and the communities where they lived and worked.

Length of Teaching Career - Chronosystem

The results of this study indicated that teachers' choices of read-aloud books evolved over the course of their teaching careers. One of the research subjects began teaching in the 1980s; two began their teaching careers in the 1990s, two in the 2000s, two in the 2010s, and three in the 2020s. Each decade has represented an increase in the availability of diverse and inclusive illustrated children's books by and about Black, Indigenous, and people of color (CCBC Diversity Statistics, n.d.). The seven teachers who began their careers before the 2020s recognized growth in their book selection over the course of their careers. They mentioned increased availability of diverse books, taking graduate and specialist endorsement coursework, and being a mom as factors that influenced their choices over time. The three teachers who began teaching in the 2020s may have participated in teacher prep programs focused on identifying and analyzing culturally relevant children's literature for the classroom (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). They may have come to the classroom better prepared to choose books that were more culturally relevant for their students. Those three teachers also entered the profession at a time when a wider range of books was available (CCBC Diversity Statistics, n.d.). Teachers with more classroom experience were more inclined to mention using classic books with their students. This could be due to their familiarity with classic titles or due to the length of time they've spent in the classroom. The differences in decision-making between early-career and veteran teachers could be explored in a future study.

Implications

The classroom read-aloud is an integral part of the day in the elementary classroom as it has been shown to impact vocabulary development (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Kindle, 2009; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Routman, 2003), improve comprehension skills (Santoro et al.,

2008), refine fluency skills (Hurst et al., 2011; Trelease, 2013), deepen the students' emotional intelligence (Forgan & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2004; Jackson & Panyan, 2002), and improve pronunciation and inflection skills (Routman, 2003). Teachers who read aloud to their students and choose culturally authentic books that encourage tolerance and highlight conflict-resolution skills help students develop empathy and understanding for others (Johnson, 2015). The opportunity to share a wide range of stories that explore different perspectives using the teacher read-aloud is seen as a valuable and effective tool (Wanless & Crawford, 2016).

The findings suggest that teachers were influenced by several factors when choosing books for a classroom read-aloud. They were primarily influenced by their students' needs and experiences. By focusing on their students' needs and experiences, teachers provided a mirror for their students (Bishop, 1990). Spending time getting to know students and their families is not wasted time. It enabled the classroom teacher to provide instruction and materials that were culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) and culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995). When they understand their audience and engage them thoughtfully in discussion of the text, they provide their students with meaningful opportunities to engage with the text (Fisher et al., 2004). When teachers read diverse and inclusive texts during their read-aloud time, they provide a mirror for some students and a window for others (Bishop, 1990; Wanless & Crawford, 2016). They intentionally broadened their students' perspectives, which, in turn, encouraged the development of empathy for peers and bonding among peers (Johnston, 2015).

With the goal of encouraging and empowering classroom teachers to use culturally relevant children's literature in classroom read-alouds, the focus should be on teacher preparation programs and professional development opportunities for practicing teachers that support their selection and critical analysis of diverse and inclusive children's literature. Highly

trained teachers arise from highly effective teacher training programs, and they, in turn, provide high-quality literacy instruction (Risko & Reid, 2019). Teacher educators should create opportunities for elementary education teaching candidates and masters of arts in teaching elementary education candidates to identify and critically analyze high-quality, culturally relevant children's literature (Sharma & Christ, 2017). Practicing teachers should ensure that their classroom libraries contain high-quality, diverse children's literature (Sharp & Johnston, 2016). Participating in professional development opportunities to revisit how to critically analyze children's literature for culturally appropriate and relevant text to include in their classrooms would be beneficial. Access to funding, for the classroom teacher or school librarian, to purchase books to supplement their collections with more culturally appropriate and relevant texts would also be beneficial.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was conducted with K-2 teachers in two Midwest states, providing a snapshot of the factors influencing teachers' decision-making when choosing books. This was conducted as a basic qualitative research study; another approach to the research question could have been an interpretive qualitative research study. Interview questions in an interpretive study could have been framed to explore what teachers meant when they described desired outcomes from sharing a particular book during a read-aloud, or to explore their intentions when choosing a book to share about a current event or a social justice issue.

A future study could include teachers across the United States, providing more insight into the exosystem and macrosystem in which teachers work when they make choices about the books they read to their students. An additional strain of research using a revised checklist (Appendix A) (Catapano et al., 2009) to evaluate their classroom libraries could include whether

they have books with culturally relevant topics and diverse authors, or whether they need to improve in that regard, and would focus on expanding on the idea that teachers are influenced by their students (microsystem). It could be worthwhile to explore the role of the school librarian and the library in providing access to culturally relevant literature and encouraging its use in read-alouds. The role and qualifications of a school librarian vary by school district and state, and these factors could influence a teacher's use of culturally relevant literature in the classroom.

Following up on some of the themes that emerged from the study's data could include comparing early-career teachers with veteran teachers and asking whether they are more likely to choose books related to social justice, current, and diverse topics based on their years of experience. Does their experience lead to greater risk-taking? Related to that, a study could examine the teacher prep program each teacher graduated from and dissect their exposure to and instruction regarding the value and use of culturally relevant texts in classroom read-alouds. This could include Master of Arts in teaching programs as well. Another thread worth exploring is the role that animals and inanimate objects play in illustrated picture books, the importance of the decision to remove race and ethnicity (and other diverse characteristics) from the discussion with students, and the impact this has on post-reading discussions. Another question that could be explored in a future study is the relationship between using illustrated children's books to teach and reinforce social-emotional skills and the role (or lack thereof) of school counselors in the classroom during read-alouds or discussions. Are school counselors available to participate in this manner in the classroom? Does their presence change the discussions that follow the reading? Finally, a study that includes books that address socio-economic status and access to resources, and how teachers use those books to facilitate classroom discussion, would be interesting to explore.

Conclusion

Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) to analyze the data, teachers reported being primarily influenced by factors within their microsystems and mesosystems; their students, and their students' lived experiences. They were deeply invested in their students, and their well-being and their book selections seemed to reflect that. If our goal is for our students to develop global perspectives and see themselves as global citizens, supporting the selection of culturally relevant books should be at the top of our list. Choosing books that allow our learners to see themselves in the text and to encounter alternate views will enable them to develop an understanding of lives beyond their own (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). This, in turn, builds empathy and understanding for others (Johnston, 2015), greater cultural competence, and a stronger capacity to interact positively with others from a background dissimilar to their own (Banks, 2018). Providing practicing teachers with support to identify books that meet those needs and to have productive, engaging conversations about the books is a necessity if we want this to happen in our schools. Training undergraduate elementary education teaching candidates and master's of arts in teaching elementary education candidates to critically analyze the books they select to share during a read-aloud and to engage their students in meaningful conversations about those books would be a worthwhile goal for teacher educator programs.

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Appendix A - Self-Evaluation Checklist

Physical Environment	Solid	Needs Work
Clearly designated library space in the room		
Space for 3-4 students		
Enough shelves or containers for my books		
Comfortable space with soft items (rug, comfortable seating)		
Display area for recently read aloud books		
Display area for 'teacher recommended' books		
Display area for 'student recommended' books		
Easy access to books		
Significant number of books displayed with covers forward		
Journal, log or method for tracking text selection/providing feedback		
Chart or place for student comments, voting on or rating books, etc.		
Additional literacy "tools" (bookmarks, post-its, review clipboards, etc.)		
Content of the Collection:	Solid	Needs Work
An adequate number of books (at least 10 books per student)		
Many high-quality books (appealing, quality content, good condition)		
A range of text formats (big books, picture books, short chapter books, chapter books) appropriate for my grade level		
A good mix of narrative, expository, and environmental text		
A variety of genres (realistic fiction, historical fiction, poetry, information, biography, etc.)		
Books appropriate for students reading at, above, or below grade level		
Many texts with characters that are about the same age as my students		
Many texts that are relevant to my students' cultural backgrounds and communities		
Many texts that can be used to support content area instruction (math, science, social studies)		
Enough texts appropriate for read alouds, book talks, literature circle sets, etc.		
Organization:	Solid	Needs Work

Clear system for organizing the books is in place		
Texts are labeled or grouped by format, genre, level or topic		
All shelves or containers are labeled with the system		
Labels are developmentally appropriate (readable labels, clip art or color-code with labels, etc.)		
Students know the system of organization and are able to use it effectively		
Students can find books at their "just right" level quickly and easily		
Management:	Solid	Needs Work
A plan for rotating books in and out of the library is in place		
An organized book check-out system in place		
The check-out system is working effectively		
Students have most of the responsibilities to manage the check-out system		
The system allows me to monitor students' selections (e.g., check out binder, reading logs)		
All aspects of the library allow children to be self-sufficient		
I am able to schedule regular times for read alouds and book talks		
My students have independent reading time regularly		
I am able to provide regular opportunities for students to share what they are reading independently		

(Catapano et al., 2009, p. 64-65)

Appendix B - Recruitment Letter

Dear (potential research participant),

I am a graduate student working on a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University. I am conducting research towards the completion of my dissertation, where my research question is: “What external factors affect teachers in kindergarten, first- and second-grade classrooms when choosing books for their classroom read-aloud?”

I am hoping to interview twelve teachers in each grade level between kindergarten and second grade. You were recommended to me by (person’s name) as someone who might be willing to participate in this study.

Participation is defined as giving consent to participate in a Qualtrics survey to gather demographic data and a maximum of two in-person interview sessions. One interview session will be the initial interview session, and the second potential interview session will be to ask any clarifying or follow-up questions and to discuss book selection. Audio from interviews will be recorded for data collection. Your identity will be kept confidential in that pseudonyms will be used for participants when reporting data. More information about the use of and confidentiality of data is found in the consent form. There is no compensation for participating in this project. Just my sincere thanks!

I am available Monday - Friday to meet with you during your planning period (if that is most convenient, if not we can schedule a time after school to meet).

Please let me know if you are willing to participate and which days and times work best for you.

Thank you for considering this and I am looking forward to interviewing you.

Respectfully,
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Appendix C - Informed Consent

PROJECT TITLE:

External factors affecting teacher selection of read-aloud books in kindergarten, first- and second-grade classrooms.

**PROJECT
APPROVAL
DATE:**

03/24/2025

**PROJECT
EXPIRATION
DATE:**

03/23/2028

**LENGTH
OF STUDY:**

12
months

**PRINCIPAL
INVESTIGATOR:**

Dr. Debbie Mercer

**CO-
INVESTIGATOR(S):**

Kerri Anderson

**CONTACT DETAILS FOR
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PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

To gain an understanding of the external factors influencing/affecting classroom teachers in kindergarten, first- and second-grade classrooms when they choose books for a classroom read-aloud.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

Qualtrics survey to gather background information. In-person interviews (2) to obtain information to answer the research question. Interviews will be recorded using Zoom software to generate a transcript for data collection.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

There are no known risks or discomforts to participants anticipated.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:

It is reasonable to expect that you may gain a deeper understanding of the decisions you make regarding the books you choose to share with your students and include in your classroom library.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

Zoom recordings will be kept in a password-protected account on a password protected computer. Recordings will be destroyed after three years. Any handwritten notes will be kept in a locked file box in a locked office. Handwritten notes will be destroyed after three years.

Your name will not be used in the data collection, you will instead be identified with a pseudonym for the purposes of reporting the data. Identifiers might be removed from the identifiable private information and after such removal, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent.

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

**PARTICIPANT
NAME:**

**PARTICIPANT
SIGNATURE:**

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DATE:

--

**WITNESS TO
SIGNATURE: (PROJECT
STAFF)**

--

DATE:

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Appendix D - Qualtrics Survey Questions/Demographic Information

1. Please enter your name and email.
 - a. (fill in the blank)
2. What grade level do you currently teach?
 - a. (select one) kindergarten, 1st grade, 2nd grade
3. What is your current level of education?
 - a. (select one) bachelor's degree, master's degree, master's degree + additional certification (Reading Specialist, etc.), doctoral degree
4. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
 - a. 1-3 years, 4-6 years, 7-10 years, 10+ years
5. Other grade levels taught
 - a. (choose all that apply) Pre-kindergarten/Pre-school, kindergarten, 1st grade, 2nd grade, 3rd grade, 4th grade, 5th grade, 6th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade, 9th – 12th grade, other (please specify)
6. At which school do you currently teach?
 - a. (select one) Amanda Arnold Elementary, Bluemont Elementary, Frank Bergman Elementary, Lee Elementary, Marlatt Elementary, Northview Elementary, Ogden Elementary, Oliver Brown Elementary, Theodore Roosevelt Elementary, Woodrow Wilson Elementary, other
7. Where did you earn your teaching degree?
 - a. (What college/university did you attend?) (fill in the blank)

Appendix E - First Round Interview Questions

Microsystem (Immediate Environment)

1. How does your personal teaching environment (classroom setup, teacher-student relationships, or school culture) influence the types of books you choose for read-alouds?
2. In what ways do your interactions with students and their families impact the books you select? For instance, do any family dynamics or cultural elements play a role in your choices?
3. How do the individual needs or preferences of your students (e.g., reading levels, interests, or emotional needs) influence your selection of books?

Mesosystem (Connections between Microsystems)

4. How does your relationship with other teachers or staff members influence the books you choose for read-alouds? Are there collaborative decisions made about certain themes or book choices in your school community?
5. How do external factors, like district policies, educational standards, or community expectations, influence your book selection and teaching style?

Exosystem (Indirect environments affecting the teacher)

6. In what ways do you feel that the socioeconomic or cultural environment of the broader community (e.g., the area where the school is located) affects the books you choose for read-alouds, either in terms of appropriateness or relevance?
7. How do educational materials or resources that are available to you (e.g., funding, access to diverse literature) impact the books you can share with your students?

Macrosystem (Cultural Context)

8. How do larger societal issues or cultural movements (e.g., social justice, inclusivity, diversity) shape the themes you choose to explore through read-aloud books?
9. In what ways do your values, cultural background, or educational philosophy impact the books you select for your students? Do you consciously try to address certain cultural or moral perspectives through your book choices?

Chronosystem (Time and Change)

10. How have your book choices for read-alouds evolved, and what factors (personal growth, changes in the classroom, educational trends) have influenced those shifts?
11. Have there been any key moments or changes in your career (e.g., shifts in educational policy, changes in student demographics) that have significantly impacted how you select books for read-alouds?

Appendix F - Second Round Interview Questions

Microsystem (Immediate Environment)

1. How do the characters or settings in these books reflect the day-to-day experiences of the children in your class (e.g., family life, school interactions)?
2. How do the books include diverse family structures or home environments that might be relatable to the students' own lives?
3. In what ways do the stories in the books allow children to see themselves, their relationships, or their immediate environments represented in the narrative?

Mesosystem (Connections between Microsystems)

4. Tell me about how the books you read aloud address the connections between home and school, or how different environments (family, school, community) influence a child's development.
5. How do the books encourage students to reflect on their relationships with peers, teachers, or family members? Are there any themes around collaboration or conflict resolution?

Exosystem (Indirect environments affecting the child)

6. How do the books address broader societal or cultural issues, such as media, government policies, or community events, that impact the characters but may not directly involve the children themselves?
7. How do the books you choose help students understand external influences on their lives (e.g., economic or social factors, like access to resources or opportunities)?

Macrosystem (Cultural Context)

8. How do the themes or messages in the books connect to larger cultural, societal, or historical contexts?
9. How are the books reflective of the values, beliefs, and cultural norms in the community or society at large? How do these stories promote understanding and empathy for diverse cultures or experiences?

Chronosystem (Time and Change)

10. How do any of the books explore themes of change, growth, or how the passage of time affects the characters or their environment? How do they help students understand life transitions or societal changes over time?
11. Which books in your read-aloud collection address generational differences or the impact of historical events on the characters' lives?

Appendix G - Debrief Statement

The following statement will be shared with the participants at the end of the interview process verbally and in writing.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed and be part of this study. As the project moves forward, I may periodically contact you regarding questions or clarifications related to some of the information you shared with me throughout this project. Overall, I am hoping to represent your words as accurately as possible. I also intend to keep your contributions anonymous and use a pseudonym to protect your identity in any publications that come from this research. The findings of the study will be available to you by request. Please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty, and you are welcome to contact me (Kerri Anderson, kerrianne@ksu.edu, 618-303-3272), the principal investigator (Debbie Mercer, dmercerc@ksu.edu, 785-532-5526) or the IRB Chair (Lisa Rubin, rubin@ksu.edu, 785-532-3224) on your consent form at any time if you have questions or concerns. Thank you for your contributions to this research.

Appendix H - Children's Literature Mentioned in Interviews

- Aardema, V. (1975). *Why mosquitoes buzz in people's ears*. Dial Books for Young Readers.
- Ali, S.K. & Muhammed, I. (2019). *The proudest blue*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.
- Andreae, G. (2022). *Brave Dave*. Orchard Books.
- Arena, J. (2022). *Acorn was a little wild*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.
- Armstrong, T. (2019). *Smarts! Everybody's got them*. Free Spirit Publishing.
- Aziz, S. (2021). *Halal hot dogs*. little bee books.
- Bandy, M. S. & Stein, E. (2015). *White water: Inspired by a true story*. Candlewick.
- Baum, F. (1900). *The wonderful wizard of oz*. George M. Hill Company.
- Beard, M. & Hernandez, L. (2021). *The pencil private (Back to school bootcamp)*. Independently Published.
- Blabey, A. (2015). *Thelma the unicorn*. Scholastic.
- Boelts, M. (2007). *Those shoes*. Candlewick Press.
- Bright, R. (2020). *Worrysaurus*. Orchard Books.
- Burach, R. (2019). *The very impatient caterpillar*. Scholastic Press.
- Burton, V. L. (1977). *Mike Mulligan and his steam shovel*. Clarion Books.
- Burton, V. L. (1942). *The little house*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Capucilli, A. S. (1996). *Biscuit*. HarperCollins.
- Capucilli, A. S. (2012). *Biscuit plays ball*. HarperCollins.
- Catrow, D. (2001). *We the kids*. Puffin Books.
- Cherry, M. (2019). *Hair Love*. Kokila.
- Child, L. (2012). *I will not ever never eat a tomato*. Orchard Books.
- Chu, R. U. (2019). *Fiona flamingo*. Puppy Dogs & Ice Cream Publishing.

Clements, A. (1998). *Frindle*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Colagiovanni, M. (2024). *The reflection in me*. Orchard Books.

Collier, T. (2023). *Broken crayons still color*. Tommy Nelson.

Cook, J. (2017). *Bubble gum brain: Ready, get mindset ... grow!* National Center for Youth Issues.

Cook, J. (2015). *But it's not my fault*. Boys Town Press.

Cook, J. (2010). *I am a booger, treat me with respect: A picture book about health and hygiene*. National Center for Youth Issues.

Cook, J. (2005). *My mouth is a volcano*. National Center for Youth Issues.

Cook, J. (2006). *A bad case of the tattling tongue: A picture book that helps kids learn the difference between tattling and telling*. National Center for Youth Issues.

Cordova, E. P. (2017). *I can't do that, yet*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Cornwall, G. (2020). *Jabari jumps*. Candlewick.

Cowley, J. (2002). *Big moon tortilla*. Astra Young Readers.

Cox, L. & Hockema, L. (2019). *Not yet*. Doodles and Dreams Publishing.

Cronin, D. (2004). *Duck for president*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Dean, J. (2010). *Pete the cat: I love my white shoes*. HarperCollins.

Demi. (1996). *The empty pot*. Square Fish.

dePaola, T. (1973). *Nana upstairs, Nana downstairs*. Putnam Juvenile.

Ferry, B. & The Fan Brothers. (2019). *The scarecrow*. HarperCollins

Finn, C. (2007). *Manners on the playground*. Picture Window Books.

Franklin, A. (2023). *Not quite Snow White*. HarperCollins.

Fox, M. & Vivas, J. (1987). *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*. Puffin Books.

- Gàg, W. (1928). *Millions of cats*. Coward-McCann.
- Garcia, G. (2017). *Listening to my body*. Skinned Knee Publications.
- Guarino, D. (2004). *Is your mama a llama?* Scholastic Inc.
- Guthrie, D. (1988). *Rose for Abby Cloth*. Abingdon Press.
- Hemming, A. (2021). *The leaf thief*. Sourcebooks Jabberwocky.
- Hemming, A. (2024). *The snow thief*. Sourcebooks Jabberwocky.
- Henkes, K. (1996). *Lily's purple plastic purse*. Greenwillow Books.
- Henkes, K. (2000). *Wemberly Worried*. HarperCollins.
- Higgins, R. T. (2018). *We don't eat our classmates!* Disney-Hyperion.
- Hoban, R. (1994). *Birthday for Frances*. HarperCollins.
- Hutchins, P. (1968). *Rosie's walk*. Simon & Schuster.
- John, J. (2019). *The bad seed*. HarperCollins.
- John, J. (2019). *The good egg*. HarperCollins.
- John, J. (2020). *The couch potato*. HarperCollins.
- Jones, C. C. (2013). *Lacy Walker, nonstop talker*. Picture Willow Books.
- Kazi, N. K. (2023). *Moon's Ramadan*. Versify.
- Keats, E. J. (1962). *The snowy day*. Viking Press.
- Krouse Rosenthal, A. (2015). *I wish you more*. Chronicle Books.
- Kamkwamba, W. & Mealer, B. (2012). *The boy who harnessed the wind*. Dial Books for Young Readers.
- Lang, S. (2020). *Grumpy monkey up all night*. Random House Studio.
- LaRocca, R. (2021). *Kamala Harris: A Little Golden Book biography*. Golden Books.

- Levine, E. (2007). *Henry's freedom box: A true story from the Underground Railroad*. Scholastic Press.
- Levy, A. & Levy, G. (2017). *What should Danny do?* Elon Books.
- Lionni, L. (1970). *Fish is fish*. Pantheon Books.
- López, S. (2021). *Frida Kahlo: A Little Golden Book biography*. Golden Books.
- Lovell, P. (2020). *Speak up, Molly Lou Melon*. G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers.
- Lovell, P. (2001). *Stand tall, Molly Lou Melon*. G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Mendez, Y.S. (2019). *Where are you from?* HarperCollins.
- Miller, P. Z. (2019). *Remarkably you*. HarperCollins.
- Montague, B. & Montague, K. (2024). *Fail-a-bration!* Dial Books for Young Readers.
- Munson, D. (2000). *Enemy pie*. Chronicle Books.
- Murphy, A. (2020). *Listen up, wonder pup*. Murphy.
- Noble, T. H. (2007). *The orange shoes*. Cherry Lake Publishing.
- O'Hair, M. (2023). *You are loved: A book about families*. Scholastic, Inc.
- Park, B. (1998). *Junie B. Jones and the stupid smelly bus*. Scholastic, Inc.
- Paul, M. (2015). *One plastic bag: Isatou Ceesay and the recycling women of Gambia*. Millbrook Press.
- Penfold, A. (2022). *All are neighbors*. Knopf Books for Young Readers.
- Penfold, A. (2018). *All are welcome*. Knopf Books for Young Readers.
- Penn, A. (2020). *The kissing hand*. Tanglewood.
- Percival, T. (2021). *Ruby finds a worry*. Bloomsbury Children's Books.
- Perrott, A. (2024). *Moo hoo*. Scholastic Press.
- Polacco, P. (2001). *Mr. Lincoln's way*. Philomel Books.

Reynolds, P. H. (2020). *Be you!* Orchard Books.

Reynolds, P. H. (2019). *Say something!* Orchard Books.

Reynolds, P. H. (2018). *Word collector*. Orchard Books.

Sachar, L. (1988). *There's a boy in the girls' bathroom*. Yearling.

Seuss, Dr. (1949). *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*. Random House Book for Young Readers.

Silverman, E. (1992). *Big pumpkin*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Sima, J. (2017). *Not quite narwhal*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Smith, M. G. (2017). *You hold me up*. Orca Book Publishers.

Snicket, L. (2017). *The bad mood and the stick*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

Soto, G. & Martinez, E. (1996). *Too many tamales*. Puffin Books.

Spinelli, E. (2001). *Night shift daddy*. Scholastic.

Stein, D. E. (2010). *Interrupting Chicken*. Penguin Random House.

Step toe, J. (1987). *Mufaro's beautiful daughters: An African tale*. Lothrop Lee & Shepard.

Stevens, J. (1995). *Tops and bottoms*. Clarion Books.

Stohler, L. (2023). *I'm a great friend*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Stuart, S. (2022). *My shadow is purple*. Larrikin House

Sweeney, J. (2018). *Me on the map*. Dragonfly Books.

Tave, P. (2019). *Beautiful as you are*. PeTika Tave.

Troiano, J. (2013). *The legend of Spookley the square pumpkin*. Scholastic, Inc.

van Hove, N. (2017). *My strong mind*. Truebridges Media.

Verdick, E. (2018). *Worries are not forever*. Free Spirit Publishing.

Viorst, J. (1972). *Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day*. Simon & Schuster.

Waber, B. (1973). *Ira sleeps over*. Clarion Books.

- Walstead, A. & Ellerton, A. (2023). *How to catch a Santa Claus*. Sourcebooks Wonderland.
- Weatherford, C. B. (2022). *Be a king: Dr. Martin Luther King's dream and you*. Bloomsbury Children's Books.
- Wilder, L. I. (1998). *A little house birthday: A classic story about Laura in the big woods for kids*. HarperCollins.
- Wilder, L. I. (2016). *Little house in the big woods*. HarperCollins.
- Williams, L. E. (2010). *The can man*. Lee & Low Books.
- Williams, V. B. (1984). *A chair for my mother*. Greenwillow Books.
- Wing, N. (2005). *The night before first grade*. Grosset & Dunlap.
- Woodson, J. (2012). *Each kindness*. Nancy Paulson Books.
- Woodson, J. (2017). *This is the rope: A story from the Great Migration*. Nancy Paulson Books.